Abstraction:

On Ambiguity and Semiosis in Abstract Painting

Joseph Daws

Submitted in fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Visual Arts
Creative Industries Faculty
Queensland University of Technology
2013

Abstract

This research project examines the paradoxical capacity of abstract painting to apparently 'resist' clear and literal communication and yet still generate aesthetic and critical meaning. My creative intention has been to employ experimental and provisional painting strategies to explore the threshold of the readable and the recognisable for a contemporary abstract painting practice. Within the exegetical component I have employed Damisch's theory of /cloud/, as well as the theories expressed in Gilles Deleuze's *Logic of Sensation*, Jan Verwoert 's writings on latency, and abstraction in selected artists' practices. I have done this to examine abstract painting's semiotic processes and the qualities that can seemingly escape structural analysis. By emphasizing the latent, transitional and dynamic potential of abstraction it is my aim to present a poetically-charged comprehension that problematize viewers' experiences of temporality and cognition. In so doing I wish to renew the creative possibilities of abstract painting.

Keywords

abstract, ambiguity, /cloud/, contemporary, Damisch, Deleuze, latency, transition, painting, *passage*, threshold, semiosis, Verwoert

Signed Statement of Originality

The work contained in this thesis has not been previously submitted to meet requirements for an award at this or any other higher institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due acknowledgement is made in the text.

Signature: 

Date: 6th of February 2014

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to my Principal Supervisor Dr Daniel Mafe and Associate Supervisor Dr Mark Pennings and acknowledge their contributions to this research project. I would like to thank them both for the generosity with which they have given their time and energy, guidance and support throughout this research project.

I would also like to thank my father, Lawrence, and my late mother, Edit, for without their own example, wisdom and support over the years I would not have found myself upon this path. And finally I would like to thank my dear wife, Dai li, for her support, advice and patience through the ups and downs of the last three and half years.

Table of Contents **Page**

Table of Figures **Page**

Introduction

This research project, *Abstraction: On Ambiguity and Semiosis in Abstract Painting* is creative practice-led research. Its content has been assigned as 75% creative works and 25% written exegesis.

Research Problem

A painting is inherently a static object. The spectator's engagement with a painting however is an experience that unfolds over time as one interacts with the various registers of perception that painting can offer. It is the temporal nature of the experience of painting that this research project examines. Specifically, this is an investigation of the *agency* (or the *performative* nature) of abstraction. This includes an examination of the qualities of ambiguity and semiosis in abstract painting. My primary interests here lie in the ability of abstraction to *pause* and *rupture* our accustomed habits of interpretation.

My creative intention has been to employ a range of experimental and provisional painting strategies to explore the thresholds of the readable and the recognisable for a contemporary abstract painting practice. The readable and recognisable qualities that I have pursued relate to thresholds of conscious awareness, perception and language. It is my contention that activating this latent zone of perception helps to engender a more poetically-charged type of aesthetic engagement. As I will show, abstraction's ambiguous qualities, such as visual slippages, transition and *passage* can help stimulate dynamic and polysemic interpretation. Such ambiguities work to pause and rupture conventional narrative structures of perception and so open up the possibilities of aesthetic experience. It is my intention to prolong the durational aspects of viewing and deepen the imaginative and poetic qualities of the aesthetic experience.

Within the exegetical component of this doctorate I have primarily analysed Damisch's theory of /cloud/, as well as the theories of Gilles Deleuze's *Logic of Sensation*, Jan Verwoert's writings on latency, emergence in abstraction and selected artists' practices. I have done this to examine abstract painting's semiotic processes and the qualities of painting that seemingly escape structural analysis. Through both the creative works and the exegetical components it is my intention to refigure and renew understandings of abstract painting's potential.

This research project can therefore be framed by the following question:

How can abstract painting apparently 'resist' clear and literal communication and yet still generate aesthetic and critical meaning?

Findings and significance of the research project

The Resistance of Abstraction

Two components make up the findings of this research project: the creative works (75%) and the written exegesis (25%). The creative works' component of my research findings were presented at the QUT Art Museum in my exhibition titled *Painting.* This exhibition consisted of 31 abstract paintings that explore visual ambiguity and symbolic polysemy. The works in the show represented a range of painting that I have undertaken during my research project, and the majority of these were painted in the six months preceding the exhibition. The written exegesis maps the journey of this research project and articulates the aesthetic and critical understandings that have developed and underpinned the creative works component. In articulating the value of my research findings I would like to address these two areas of interrelated research.

As my research question states the intentions of this doctoral project have been to examine the qualities of abstract painting that resist clear and direct communication, as well as understanding and describing the types of experience that result from an engagement with this style. This has therefore been a focused study on the contemplative measures of abstract painting.

A key significance of this research project lies in the application of Damisch's concept /cloud/, (which I address in detail in chapter 2) to contemporary abstract painting. For now let it suffice that for Damisch the cloud, through its depiction within the Western tradition of painting, became more than its literal depiction and instead acted as a semiological 'hinge', a joint or a fold in the field of representation: it became what he terms /cloud/. I have then applied this notion of Damisch by identifying and describing the specific qualities of abstraction that give rise to what he terms in painting, /cloud/. This includes aesthetic qualities such as ambiguity, interpretative pausing and rupture, visual and interpretative dynamics of transition, *passage* and polysemy that arises from latent memory and liminal associations. The analysis of /cloud/ therefore

also includes an exploration of the temporal nature of the experience of /cloud/. In applying Damisch's /cloud/ to contemporary abstract painting I have extended his analysis of /cloud/ by examining a range of contemporary painters who exhibit the forementioned qualities in their work. My creative works — and the manner in which they are installed in exhibition — exemplify many of these qualities. I have also detailed how I have applied these qualities to the processes of my creative practice.

Within the written exegesis I have established through the writings of Hubert Damisch, Gilles Deleuze and Jan Verwoert an interpretative framework that articulates an understanding of painting as a symbolically significant and sensuous manifold. This is predicated on a phenomenological understanding that painting — through its material specificity — simultaneously affects different registers of perception, from the rational (extensive) to the affective (intensive). The resistance of abstraction to clear and direct communication works to pause and rupture our habitual modes of interpretation by breaking the codes and laws of recognition and identity that are used to comprehend visual forms. This research therefore examines the nature of the sign in painting and explores what constitutes the thresholds of the readable and recognisable for a contemporary abstract painting practice. This has to do with the degree to which the painterly mark, element, form or sign is referential or associational.

With these issues in mind I have explored a range of strategies of abstract painting. My intentions have been to 'grasp the middle' of an abstract painting practice (to borrow the phrase from Badiou).[1] By presenting a range of abstract styles no individual intention or over-riding order comes to dominate the reading of the work. This has resulted from the application of the qualities of

[1] This phrase comes from Badiou's essay *Of Life as a Name of Being, or, Deleuze's Vitalist Ontology* (1998) Badiou states: 'take things by the middle; do not first try to find one extremity and then move towards the other. No. The middle must be grasped so that the sense of the trajectory of thought is not fixed by a principle of order or of succession; but so that it is instead fixed by the moving metamorphosis that actualises one of the extremities into its most detached counterpart.'

/cloud/ to my own creative practice. Here the qualities of pause and rupture, transition, slippages and emergence that can be associated with /cloud/ work to mix up and break established clichés and habitual intentions of creative practice in order to explore a range of creative potentials. While I acknowledge that my approach still comprises of an intention, I believe it is one that seeks to open up readings of the work and creative practice.

Using experimental and provisional abstract painting strategies through the employment, and editing, of 'controlled chance' I have sought to develop an elemental abstract painterly vocabulary. I want to give the spectator sufficient visual content to gain an interpretative foothold in the experience of the painting, but not in a way that is overly literal, illustrative or narrative driven. (However, I do not wish to produce work that encourages the spectator to enter a chaotic experience of pure sensation, a la Jackson Pollock.) Francis Bacon's discussion of the difference between illustrative and non-illustrative form is instructive in this regard:

> I think that the difference is that an illustrational form tells you through the intelligence immediately what the form is about, whereas a non-illustrational form works first upon sensation and then slowly leaks back into fact. (Deleuze and Bacon 2003, 56)

It is the latter process that Bacon describes that interests me. Firstly, ambiguity that is generated by the initial undoing or avoidance of representation produces a resistance to recognition; and secondly, the slow leaking back into language that operates not in a reductive manner, but rather in a generative manner, as (in his words) a 'graph' of possibility.

By imbuing symbolic and syntactic ambiguity in pictorial relationships in my abstractions I have attempted to muddle some of the conventional laws and codes of visual interpretation. In doing so I hope to engender a mode of pictorial resistance that slows down the spectator's habitual processes of looking and interpretation to help them focus on the 'experience' of the painting. By

building up and paring back visual content to a degree that reaches the thresholds of the readable and recognisable I have attempted to target the temporal state of apprehension, where either language emerges or is assigned or remains suspended in an imaginative and creative deferral. While it can be said that all art does this to some extent, it is the quality of a particular type of abstraction that plays with visual ambiguity and causes interpretative slippages, transitions and *passage* to problematize the act of viewing and generate symbolic polysemy.

In making and presenting a body of work in exhibition one consideration that has been at the forefront of my thinking is how /cloud/ can operate at the level of the overall installation and what kinds of experience and readings develop from this. Accordingly, my paintings have been arranged into clusters to play off difference and repetition within and between the works. Doing so sets up a reading across the body of work that pauses and ruptures any chronological or serial reading. It also seeks to create conceptual *passage* between the individual paintings. For example, groups of small-scale paintings (a repetition of format) are set together to encourage the viewer to closely examine the differences in content and expression. Other strategies involve the pairing of abstract works that might look similar, but have been treated differently in terms of paint handling. This configuration discourages the habitual type of looking that can occur when viewing works of a serial nature when it is assumed that the works in the series are so similar that closer scrutiny is not warranted. My paintings retain their distinct and individual qualities and each work appears fresh in the eyes of the spectator as they display a range of variegated processes and approaches towards abstraction. This pairing of work allows a reading of the body of work almost as though it was a type of meta-abstraction or 'abstraction about abstraction'. By presenting abstract paintings that broach the threshold of the readable and the visible, the viewer can be made more aware of the way s/he negotiates visual interpretation.

Ultimately, this research has targeted a more contemplative mode of thinking about abstract painting's capacity to realign knowledge and meaning, from the

cycles of reproduction and dissemination that dominate our visual culture. I have not sought to provide answers as to how I as an artist, and we as viewers, create meaning, rather I wish to show how art in complicating this process encourages and provokes new dimensions of thought and critical reflection. Abstract painting can offer us an experience we have not had before.

Exegetical Design

The exegesis has been developed in four chapters. Chapter 1: Methodology, outlines the ontological and epistemological foundations and the methodology that have underpinned and directed this research project. This consists of four sections. First, I introduce Deleuze and Guattari's understandings of the *performative* nature of art, and in particular, of abstraction through their concept of the Abstract Machine. This analysis also sets up my later discussion of Damisch' and Verwoert's understanding of the performative nature of art in Chapter 2. Secondly, I discuss Paul Crowther's writings on Phenomenology in order to establish an ontological foundation for the experience of art as operating simultaneously on various registers of perception. Thirdly, I described the methods and strategies of practice-led research through the writings of Graeme Sullivan. This leads to a more detailed examination in the final section on creative practice-led research and in particular process-led creative practice through the writings of Barbara Bolt.

Chapter 2: Art Theory, consists of three sections that examines in detail the performative nature of abstraction. Section One, /Cloud/: The Dynamics of Painting, introduces the key guiding concept for this research project, Damisch's Theory of/Cloud/ and traces Damisch's analysis of /cloud/ in painting from the High Renaissance and Ancient Chinese Brush Painting through to the late works of Cézanne. Section Two, The Sign in Painting, examines the nature of the sign in painting when painting shifts (through abstraction) the sign from being a signifier towards a sensation (or a 'graph' of possibility). Section Three examines contemporary understandings of emergence, abstraction and latency through the writings of Jan Verwoert, Charles Bernstein, John Rajchman and Barry

Schwabsky that correspond with the aesthetic qualities of /cloud/ articulated in the preceding sections.

Chapter 3: Exemplars, examines eight painters who each display qualities of /cloud/ in their work. The chapter has been arranged by pairing artists to highlight the similarities and differences of their particular style and modes of practice. This chapter also begins to describe the shifts that occurred within my own painting practice as a result of my engagement with these artist's work and the writings discussed in Chapter 2.

Chapter 4: Studio is divided into the three major research cycles of my project and a discussion of my final exhibition. This chapter provides a critical overview of my practice at the level of the individual paintings and also analyses the shifts, choices and developments that have occurred during the project. By linking the creative practice back to concepts raised in Chapters 2 and 3 I detail how understandings of /cloud/ work at the level of creative practice.

Chapter 1: Methodology

In order to describe the research methodology I have employed I would first like to examine some foundational ontological and epistemological conceptions that underpin my research project. Two key considerations that have influenced my research topic, and have contributed to my methodology, are firstly, a negotiation of the nature of intentionality; and secondly, a notion that Felix Guattari calls 'the production of subjectivity'. These two issues relate to how one goes about making art, including the processes employed in the creative act, and the type of experience one wants from, and intends for, the work of art. This also extends to the conception of what entails the 'work' of art.

Deleuze and Guattari

> Something in the world forces us to think. This something is an object not of recognition but of a fundamental encounter. (Deleuze 1994, 139)

The above quote, taken from *Difference and Repetition* (1968) by Gilles Deleuze, is used by Simon O'Sullivan in his introduction to his book *Art Encounters Deleuze and Guattari: Thought Beyond Representation* (2006). This statement points us toward a core concern of Deleuze's philosophy, namely the necessary yet blindsiding propensity of human perception to be conditioned by habit and self-interest.

An artwork functions on various registers of consciousness, including the rational, the sensory and affective, and the socio-historical. It is also important to recognize that the experience of an artwork posits a 'fundamental encounter' and an 'object of recognition', to some degree. In order to understand the difference between a 'fundamental encounter' and an encounter with an 'object of recognition' let us first look at an object of recognition. For O'Sullivan experiencing an object of recognition is a reaffirmation and reinforcement of our

habitual way of being in the world. (O'Sullivan 2006, 1) This is based on Deleuze's assertion that thought responding to representation, recognition and identity 'all imply an *a priori* nature of thought, a telos, a meaning and a logic of practice.' (Roffe 2002) This condition reduces images of thought to both that of the same and the similar, and can produce a situation whereby 'difference as divergence, disparateness, or dissimilarity cannot be affirmed by representation.' (Scott 2011)

An experience of a Deleuzian fundamental encounter on the other hand creates a rupture to our habitual subjectivities. This can be an affirmative experience when one improvises a creative response in order to see and think the world anew. (O'Sullivan 2006, 1) Art can provide a fundamental encounter, as O'Sullivan describes:

> Art, in breaking one world and creating another, brings these two moments (rupture and affirmation) into conjunction. Art then is the name of the object of an encounter, but is also the name of the encounter itself, and indeed of that which is produced by the encounter. Art is this complex event that brings about the possibility of something new (O'Sullivan 2006, 2).

O'Sullivan is describing Deleuze's machinic (or performative) understanding of art - what Deleuze terms an Abstract Machine. Here the artwork through a process of de-familiarisation, or as Deleuze terms it deterritorialisation, shifts aesthetic experience away from a transcendental horizon, which can be understood in the platonic sense as an abstracting (in the literal sense of extracting) to higher levels of generality or classification through representational thought.[2] A deterritorialisation pauses and ruptures the interpretation of a representation and shifts the viewer's temporal state towards

[2] Yves-Alain Bois' sees a similar operation at work in Bataille's *informe*. In *Formless: A User's Guide* (1997), he examines the *agency* of an artwork as its 'value as an operation'. Bataille's *informe* introduces an understanding of the artwork as performative, in so much as its goal is to 'disappoint expectation' and to create 'slippages' that serve to declassify, (Bois 1997,p18)

a state of immanence that returns us to the concrete specificity of the artwork in its material, affective and intensive manifestation.[3] (Rajchman 1995, 18-19)

Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the abstract machine forms the foundation of the ontological, epistemological and methodological paradigms that have driven my practice-led research project. It is important to acknowledge that the concept of *new images of thought* that can arise from the experience of a *fundamental encounter* has acted as a catalyst for the developments that have occurred in my painting practice. Moreover, other concepts that Deleuze and Guattari have developed (within what has been called by Keith Robinson their 'metaphysics of creativity'), the rhizome, 'chaosmosis', and the 'production of the new' have helped to underpin broader understandings of practice and the experience of the 'work' of art. (Robinson 2010, 122) Engaging with their writings has changed the way I think about and make art. It has made me reconsider the types of propositions I intend for my paintings and different modes through which meaning can be generated.

Phenomenology

One can argue that the artwork exists in a state of potentiality, and that the engagement with the work of art (for the artist and the viewer) involves an experience of reciprocity. This can also be said of our state of being in the world. Paul Crowther examines our ontological reciprocity with the world in his book *Art and Embodiment*. In it he quotes Merleau-Ponty's views on our intentional stance towards the world:

[3] Interestingly, Victor Shklovsky wrote on this same process in his essay *Art as Technique (1917)*. 'The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects 'unfamiliar', to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged.'(Shklovsky 1917, 12)

> The life of consciousness — cognitive life, the life of desire or perpetual life — is subtended by an 'intentional arc' which projects round about us our past, our future, our human setting, our physical, ideological, and moral situation, or rather which results in our being situated in all these respects. (Crowther 1993, 2)

Crowther sees our being in the world as an inseparable unity of rational, sensory, affective and socio-historical factors, which has a phenomenological and logical basis. (Crowther 1993, 2) The phenomenological element is largely pre-reflective in that we do not consciously separate all the contributing factors of experience. The logical aspect, he states: 'is that all the elements operative in a moment of experience form a qualitative whole. Remove one of them and the charater of the whole is changed.' (Crowther 1993, 2) Given the nature of our ontological reciprocity with the world and the inseparability of phenomenological and logical elements, Crowther asks: how do we arrive at a *full* and *explicit* understanding of the world? (Crowther 1993, 2) The problem he sees lies in the conflict between 'full' and 'explicit', for if we adopt a reflective attitude and focus our intentionality upon a particular element of experience we break the qualitative unity of the whole. The point that Crowther makes (and one that I see as important for the inclusion of creative practice as a research method, and creative works as evidence of research in my methodology) is that

> Between our most fundamental reciprocity with the world *qua* embodied subjects, and our attempts to express it explicitly in philosophical or other kinds of theoretical concepts, there is an abyss. Abstract concepts alone cannot fully recapture the concreteness of ontological reciprocity. We can offer an analysis and description of it, but the act of analysis and description is at best is a kind of looking on from above. (Crowther 1993, 2)

By documenting my research findings in two ways - through creative works and a written exegesis, it is possible to present a more complete understanding of

the particular qualities in painting that this research has targeted. I have therefore employed a multi-method practice-led research methodology for this research project. I will detail the particular strategies of my methodology in the following two sections.

Practice-led Research

This research project began from an idea borne out of practice. This idea was to examine an interstitial space in painting between figuration and abstraction that produced visual and symbolic polysemy. While this idea has driven my research project, my research question has broadened in scope to examine the qualities of resistance to clear and direct communication that abstract painting offers and the kinds of meaning that are generated from such an experience.

Graeme Sullivan defines the dynamic of practice-led research as a triangulation between the artist/practitioner, the creative works and the critical process. (Sullivan 2009, 47) He states that what is crucial for practice led-research is 'the interdependence of these domains and the central role that making plays in the creation of knowledge.' (Sullivan 2009, 47) My interest in using practice-led research methods is how creative practice — and in particular process-led creative practice — can generate content in advance of any preconceived intentions. However in order to turn the idiosyncratic and free-ranging experimental nature of creative practice into research findings outcomes need to be accounted for through descriptions of the triangulation of creative practice, critical reflection and reflexive action. In resolving this I have drawn upon a range of critical methods from the fields of philosophy, phenomenology, art history, art theory, art criticism and research theory. Here critical reflection allows theory to become a mirror of sorts and assists in finding the conceptual language to articulate and assess the content that arises from the practice. Reflexive action as expressed through research cycles, appropriate documentation, journaling and critical reflection allows one to synthesise new insights, draw appropriate conclusions, and develop further plans of action.

The Creative Process and the Production of the New

As indicated above my research methods, in terms of creative practice, have been largely influenced by the Deleuze and Guattari writings on the 'production of the new'. Barbara Bolt's consideration of Heidegger, Deleuze, originality and 'Handlability' has helped clarify the nature of my creative practice in terms of the difference between contemplative knowledge and concrete understanding. In her paper *The Exegesis and the Shock of the New* (2004) Bolt examines the nature of creative practice when it is process-led, rather than conceptually pre-determined. On such practice she states:

> The 'new' cannot be preconceived. In the face of seemingly limitless possibilities, practice cannot know or preconceive its outcome. Rather, the new emerges through process as a shudder of an idea, which is then realised in and through language. This languaging is the task of the exegesis. (Bolt 2004, 3)

Bolt describes how in process-led art practice we develop the new through the 'shudder of an idea'. Here she draws on Heidegger's belief that theoretical understanding arises in response to our concrete engagement or handling of the world. (Bolt 2004, 3) This relates to our basic ontological reciprocity with, or our grounding in the world. 'Handlability' offers a different kind of vision and thinking that Heidegger terms 'circumspection' (Umsicht) (Bolt 2004, 3) Bolt draws on the ability of art to break our habitual modes of being towards the world and the way it can produce new experience. She highlights the role that Deleuze assigns to 'catastrophe' (in the processes of painting) in overcoming the clichés of thought and illustration. Bolt identifies the creative potential of an engagement with chaos, and the realisations that emerge from this process as essential to process-led creative arts research. Bolt's writings, Deleuze's *Logic of Sensation*, and Raphael Rubenstein's understandings of 'Provisional Painting' have informed my art practice. I address these issues more directly in the following chapters: Deleuze in chapters two and three, and 'Provisional Painting'

in the final section of the chapter three in relation to the painter Raoul De Keyser.

Chapter 2: Art Theory

Section 1: /Cloud/ - The dynamics of painting

In *A Theory of /Cloud/* (1972 eng. trans 2002) Hubert Damisch undertakes a study of how painters through history have used clouds in painting. In doing so he examines the variegated ways artists have used the transformative and formless properties of clouds in the services of their artistic vision. When developing his theory of /cloud/ Damisch examines the shift that occurred in the compositional and stylistic depiction of clouds from Quattrocento painting into the High Renaissance and early Baroque period when painters sought a more dynamic understanding of space. High Renaissance artists such as Correggio began to exploit the transformative properties of clouds. He broke with the traditional format of ceiling painting that relied on fixed spatial coordinates and self-contained spaces, and instead employed tromp l'oeil effects to open up the space of the dome (in effect to pierce the surface of the buildings architecture and open it up to a sky). (Damisch 2002, 1) Examples of Correggio's variegated conceptual use of cloud can be seen in his use of cloud as compositional devices for staging, entrapping and separating figures and also for the development of spatial dynamics within the overall composition.

In this process the cloud became more than its literal depiction for it acted as a semiological 'hinge', a joint or a fold in the field of representation: it became /cloud/. Rosalind Krauss explains:

> Before being a thematic element — functioning in the moral and allegorical sphere as a registration of miraculous vision, or of ascension, or as the opening onto divine space; or in the psychological sphere as an index of desire, fantasy, hallucination; or, for that matter, before being a visual integer,

> the image of vaporousness, instability, movement — the /cloud/ is a differential marker in a semiological system. (Haskell et al. 1992, 85)

The flexibility bestowed upon the signifier cloud, forms an internal dynamic that gives rise to the idea of '/cloud/'. The /cloud/ is the product of semiotic operations — or pictorial 'graphs' — that can shift between interpretative and perceptual registers within the painting 'both in a signalling sense and syntactically.' (Damisch 2002, 16) The /cloud/ therefore performs like a 'free vector' in the phenomenology of the artwork.

In his book *Art in Mind: How Contemporary Images Shape Thought* (2005), Ernst Van Alpen claims that Damisch's writings are 'directed by the conviction that painting and other cultural products *perform*, in one way or another, an intellectual or philosophical project.' For Damisch, art needs to be understood as a form of thought, and this paradigm permeates his approach to art history. Traditional approaches to art history that take the art object as a manifestation of a cultural milieu or a historical moment deny the freedom to explore more general and abstract, trans-historical and inter-cultural questions. Rather than focussing upon issues of artistic intention as traditional art history does, Damisch's inquiry was directed towards identifying the performative operation of art, and in the case of painting, its 'pictorial intelligence', or the intellectual thrust of an image (Alphen 2005, 2).

In his essay *Having an Idea in Cinema* (1988) Deleuze discusses what it means to have an idea. He believes an idea is inextricably linked to the form with which one is working. 'Ideas must be treated as potentials that are already engaged in this or that mode of expression and are inseparable from it, so much so that I cannot say that I have an idea in general.' (Kaufman & Heller 1998, 14) Deleuze here sees the idea in philosophy as being involved in the invention of concepts; whereas in cinema the idea is presented in blocs of celluloid movements/duration, and in painting as the blocs of sensation. Accordingly, the idea expressed in a medium such as cinema or painting is not of the same order

as concepts or communication expressed in written or verbal form. The very nature of an idea being bound in its visual mode of production makes communication of this idea irreducible to expression in a written or verbal language.

Deleuze sees information as a system of control, one that reinforces the dominant modes of thought, ideology or hegemony. That being the case, we can see how art, and in my case visual abstraction, can function as a form of resistance that counters the intentionality and ideology of information and language. It is important to note that my interest here lies in the ability of abstract painting to resist a clear and transparent type of communication. This is not to say abstraction is against communication. Just that I use abstraction to seek a different type of communication in painting. It is my intention to show that abstraction's resistance to a clear and direct communication opens up new possibilities for a more poetically charged communication.

What is interesting about Damisch's approaches is that while he employs a structuralist reading of art objects, this is done to bring into sharper relief that which escapes such analysis. Importantly his analysis of painting draws on the signifying and symbolic aspects of painting that present themselves not through identifiable signifiers, but rather through qualities in painting that can be considered a-signifying (in the sense that they are not signifiers and hence do not point towards any particular referent) such as style, syntax, composition and affect. And it is in this analysis that we can begin to see a deeper understanding of what constitutes pictorial intelligence in painting. In order to tease out Damisch's understanding of these qualities in painting I will now examine two areas in which he applies his analysis of /cloud/, Ancient Chinese Painting and the late works of Cézanne.

Ancient Chinese Painting

In developing his theory of /cloud/ Damisch considers the different conceptions of space in ancient Chinese painting as compared to Renaissance painting. He notably focuses upon ancient Chinese Ink and Brush painting from the Song and Yuan Dynasties. While both traditions, quattrocento Italian painting and ancient Chinese brush painting, possessed different understandings of classicism and spatial construction, there were artists who sought to transgress these values. In terms of conceptions of space in painting, Chinese painting never sought to limit itself to one viewpoint as in classical western perspective. This is because explorations of space in ancient Chinese painting sought compositional dynamics that reflected Daoist understandings of nature as a dynamic unity in eternal flux.

The dialectical conceptions that underpin ancient Chinese painting and thought develop from the Daoist concept of Yin and Yang, or the unity of opposites. In *The Principles of Chinese Painting* (1947) George Rowley explains how this concept permeates Chinese thought:

> Coherence was to be found in the dualism of forces throughout the universe, whose interaction is the source of life — heaven and earth, male and female, birth and death. By analogy every possible duality was supposed to express this cosmic relation. (Rowley 1947, 50)

These principles can be seen in other concepts that were important in ancient Chinese painting, such as 'Kai ho', (Kai – expanding or opening and ho – gathering up) which describes artistic creation as processes of 'opening and joining'; opening through chaos (akin to the Deleuzian 'diagram' and catastrophe) and joining through union (again paralleling Deleuze's isolation of the 'diagram' so that the 'diagram' does not cover the entire painting). The balancing of these two forces constitute a unity as coherence that maintains a dynamic tension within the painting. While this tension applies to the overall

composition, it also applies to the movement and tension of the unique brushstroke. Rowley describes this dynamic within the creation of the Chinese ideograph, or written character and also the overall composition of ancient Chinese painting.

> Both concern force and are intimately related, but movement is force which begins to flow in a direction, while tension results from the interaction of forces. They mutually need one another lest the movement should become all flux and lest tension should degenerate into static balance. (Rowley 1947, 48)

This understanding was part of an aesthetic system, which extended from the internal form of the unique brush stroke to the overall pictorial and rhythmic effects of the composition.

Qualities such as 'chi-yun' (spirit-resonance) and 'sheng-tung' (life-movement) are integral components in ancient Chinese painting. These qualities are manifest as compositional rhythms that create an optical dynamic across in the surface design, otherwise known as 'long mai' (dragons veins). The compositional lines that run through an image contribute to its energy, dynamism and vitality. George Rowley uses an unattributed quote that describes the qualities of 'dragon veins':

> Make dragon veins slanting or straight, complete or in fragments, hidden or visible, broken or continuous, but all bristling with life, then you will make a real picture. Rhythmic abstraction and rhythmic relation being inseparable, the notion of lung-mo (long mai) was extended to the flow of the whole design. (Rowley 1947, 68)

In their operation, in their *passage* (or revolutions as Damisch calls them), 'chi-yun' and 'sheng-tung' charge the painting with an energy and dynamism, not only in the opticality of surface effects, but also in the dialectical tensions set up between different elements and spaces within the composition. These latter qualities can be seen in the unity of coherence, the unity of opposites and the unity of consonance, earth and sky, trees and rock, cloud and mountain, trees becoming cloud, cloud becoming mountain, cloud becoming ocean. (Fig 1)

Fig 1: Gao Ran Hui (attr.) Summer Mist (13th or 14th Century) Traditionally attributed to Mi Fu. (Image can be seen in the English translation of Damisch's A Theory of /Cloud/)

The void is another integral component in Chinese painting. Sometimes this takes the form of emptiness, where areas of the painting are left blank and function to separate parts of the composition. Other times the void marks the place of clouds in the painting, as the white of the background paper forms the cloud. The area between things (or slippages) — whether it is in terms of the illusion and the ground, or in terms of the ambiguity of form — between the

known and the unknown, require an active participation by the viewer to interpret its many registers. In acknowledging both the optical effects and dialectical aspects of ancient Chinese painting Damisch arrives at what he sees as the fundamental principle in the ancient Chinese theory of painting: 'painting should be recognized to be a *specific signifying practice*.' He states,

> It is on the basis of that specificity, of the *difference* upon which it is founded as a signifying practice, that painting should be considered in its relationship to reality — a relationship of understanding rather than expression, of *analogy* rather than duplication, of *working* rather than substitution. (Damisch 2002, 224)

Cezanne

In concluding his theory of /cloud/ Damisch turns his attention to the late works of Cezanne. Damisch sees in the unfinished nature of the artist's late paintings a decisive break from preceding practices in western painting. Cezanne's method of painting dispensed with the convention of covering the substratum of the canvas as had traditionally been done to generate a convincing illusion. Instead through the empty spaces — those areas of the painting he could not place for fear of destroying the balance and tensions he had set up — Cezanne reaffirmed the flat surface of the painting. Damisch describes this process as a shift from illusionistic space to a more abstract pictorial surface:

> It is through this shift from an *image*, offered to the imagination, to a *picture,* offered as such to the spectator's perception, even more than through the deconstruction of the traditional space that made that shift possible, that Cezanne's work at the turn of the twentieth century marks a *break*. (Damisch 2002, 226-7)

Fig 2: Paul Cézanne, *Route Tournante*, 1904 - 1905, oil on canvas, 73 x 92 cm
(http://arttattler.com/archivecourtauldcezannes.html)

What is interesting about Cezanne's paintings however is that this break does not totally dispense with traditional pictorial values. Cezanne was still very interested in creating sensations of depth in his paintings. His method of construction used individual brushstrokes or patches of colour to form an interwoven lattice structure. (Fig 2) The surface design that evolves from his method is similar to the compositional dynamics of the ancient Chinese 'dragon veins'. In Cezanne they are implied by the edges of the patches of colour he applied and extended across the picture plane. What results is an over-all optical dynamism that circulates a *moving focus* across the surface of the image. The movement or *passage* that is generated by this dynamism integrates different depths within the pictorial planes of the painting (as opposed to classical perspective). Importantly, the transitional quality of *passage* in Cezanne's paintings also made the forms themselves begin to transform or breakdown.

Fig 3: Paul Cézanne *Rocks Near the Caves above Château Noir* (1895-1900). Watercolour and pencil on paper, 31.7 x 47.5 cm

(http://www.moma.org/collection/provenance/provenance_object.php?object_id=33280)

If we examine Cezanne's studies of rock formations (fig 3) in the hills around Chateau Noir we can see the results of his ambitions to represent the structure and order of nature yet conveyed something of its unity and flux. Damisch observes that the rocks in these studies resemble cloud forms, and we can see /cloud/ arise as Cezanne's abstraction subverts clear identification of the rocks. Cezanne transformed something that was usually depicted as solid (rock) into something that was intangible and ambiguous (cloud). He thus revealed the artifice of illusion and treated the painting as object. This *slippage* undoes painterly illusion and draws a conventional reading of an image into question. There is also a double articulation of the /cloud/ here, as the rock becomes a cloud, while at the same time, figurative illusion becomes an abstract surface. This kind of adumbration undermines the dyadic boundaries of the image. This dynamic prompts a *suspension* of the spectator's comprehension and engenders an imaginative play with the image as a visual multiplicity.

Damisch's analysis of art as an inherently a *performative* operation that requires us to think with the art object is a proposition that parallels Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the Abstract Machine. In his book *Art Encounters Deleuze and Guattari: Thought Beyond Representation* (2006) Simon O'Sullivan claims:

> We no longer ask the interminable question: 'what does art, what does this art work, *mean*?' But rather, 'what does art, what does this art work, *do*?' Or, again, following Lyotard, 'what does this art work set in motion? ... It is here that we begin to modify the notion of the aesthetic, to pull it away from the metaphysics of presence, away from the transcendent horizon, towards a field of immanence. Indeed, aesthetics might be understood as simply the name for an affective deterritorialisation, a becoming. The aesthetic effect — or simply *affect* — as precisely a break in habit. (O'Sullivan 2006, 22)

Damisch's /cloud/ articulates and describes this positive nature of resistance to a transparent and clear communication in art. It is positive in the sense that the spectator is provoked into new interpretative acts, rather than passive comprehension. In presenting that which is allusive or evasive, that which is shifting or in transition, and that which cannot be named, /cloud/ refuses a stable reading. As such the /cloud/ offers an experience of apprehension, rather than comprehension. (Scrivener, 2002 1) To develop this notion further, Damisch describes an experience in which:

> The surface of the cleavage between the semantic and the semiotic is not to be sought between the level of the figure (given to be seen) and that of signification (given to be understood), but somewhere on the joint of the readable and the visible, between the domain of the symbolic and the semiotic, on the condition of thinking of the semiotic … as a modality (which one could call psycho-somatic, with a direct hold on the body) of the process of significance, and as a moment logically, genetically, productively

> anterior to the symbolic, but which in the latter is made the object of a *raising* by which it is integrated there. (Damisch 2005, 266)

To engage with the unknown or the unnameable — the qualities of painting that lie beyond representation yet still 'lay claim to a symbolic order' — is to actively engage one's imagination in a generative process that develops from an interpretative participation with the artwork. (Damisch 2002, 231)

Damisch's /cloud/ has been a foundational concept for my research project. It has introduced me to an epistemology that seeks to qualify that which escapes traditional forms of analysis in painting. This is achieved through a materialist ontology that recognizes the registers of *affect* that arise from ambiguity, sensation, colour, tension and balance, rhythm, force and /cloud/ in certain kinds of painting.

Section 2: The Sign in Painting

Damisch identifies an analogy between poetic practice and certain pictorial practices in the way that 'both seem to threaten the hierarchy of functions that constitutes the basis for the interchange of signs.'(Damisch 2002, 28) If one is targeting qualities such as ambiguity, transition and latency that give rise to /cloud/ then it is worthwhile to examine how poetical and pictorial practices work to undermine the functioning of the sign in their respective modes of production.

It can be argued as Christophe Bode does in his essay 'The Aesthetics of Ambiguity' that ambiguity is central to the poetical and literary language of modernity. (Bode 1988, 74) Formal linguistics defines poetic language as that which takes everyday language out of its prosaic use and applies it in a manner that seeks to generate additional meaning through a secondary structuring. (Bode 1988, 74-5) And it is from secondary structuring that new symbolic levels

arise. However, Bode recognizes that one cannot escape the primary meaning in language:

> As no secondary structuring of language can totally obliterate the customary and deeply ingrained referential meanings of these elements but can only, by various devices, loosen their formal ties, these elements now characteristically oscillate between what they usually mean and the new meaning they are striving to constitute. (Bode 1988, 75)

Words as linguistic units, like representational signs and certain symbols, retain their culturally bestowed referential meanings. Given this situation, Bode asks how can the poet open up the reading of the language they use in order to establish a new semiosis and develop the secondary structuring of their written form? (Bode 1988, 77)

He believes this can be achieved when the poet strives for auto-referentiality by breaking 'semiosis-restricting devices' such as all primary codes of writing, including its semantic, syntactic and phonological codes and rules. For Bode, the moment when the signifiers become liberated (the free floating signifier) and 'multiply interpretable', constitutes a 'semiotic take-off' in which the free-play between signifiers 'does not allow just one reading, it cries out for multiple decoding'. (Bode 1988, 78) For Bode auto-referentiality arises in literature from the following process:

> When you reassemble linguistic elements in a strange and unusual way you force the reader to slow down his reading, you render his acts of recognition more difficult, while at the same time you appeal to this flexibility, imagination and re-creative freedom . . . they are auto-referential in the sense that they direct the reader toward their essential and fundamental ambiguity. (Bode 1988, 75)

Bode claims that the distinction of a sign (in literature) as being auto-referential becomes problematic because a sign is understood as something that refers to something else, which suggests that a sign cannot refer only to itself. Consequently, a sign that leaves behind its referentiality ceases to have meaning, and instead becomes 'a thing, or event'. As such it becomes a 'unique offer, an offer to experience something unusual.' (Bode 1988, 76) In the case of writing, pure auto-referentiality is impossible as words always contain their customary meaning). In the case of painting, the sign is not limited to a pre-established written or verbal language. That said, it is also unclear the extent to which paint can become purely auto-referential for painting always seems associational in some sense. The plasticity of paint does however stretch the dominion of the sign from clear units of language (words) to a spectrum of associational and intensive registers.

If we turn then to the nature of the sign in painting, we can see that Damisch's analysis of painting targets the embodied nature of content and expression in paint as inherent elements that can destabilise the reading of a sign. He states that an analysis of the semiotic level in painting

> Needs to circumvent the flat surface upon which the image is depicted in order to target the image's texture and its depth as a *painting*, striving to recover the levels, or rather registers, where superposition (or intermeshing) and regulated interplay — if not entanglement — define the pictorial process in its signifying materiality. (Damisch 2002, 14)

Damisch is calling for an understanding of painting that goes beyond an understanding of semiotic signs as linguistically defined concepts. Gilles Deleuze addresses this topic in his book *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* (2004). In keeping with his larger philosophical project of generating new images of thought (new philosophical concepts), Deleuze examines the question: what are the conditions for the production of the new in painting? (Deleuze and Bacon 2003, 1) Here Deleuze singles out the destruction of the cliché as primary in this

endeavour. The cliché here constitutes the figurative givens, those conventional representations we use to classify and understand the world, and can be termed a logic of recognition. However the cliché also includes psychic clichés, such as the artist's sense of self-identity.

> These floating images, these anonymous clichés, which circulate in the external world, but which also penetrate each one of us and constitute his internal world, so that everyone possesses only psychic clichés by which he thinks and feels, is thought and is felt, being himself a cliché among the others in the world which surround him. (Deleuze 1986, 208)

Deleuze saw in Bacon an artist who engaged in painting in such a way as to destroy the cliché or the 'sovereign optical organisation' of the image; an act he described as engaging the 'diagram'. This involved a movement away from rational painting at the service of mimesis, and towards irrational painting that produces sensation. By engaging the 'diagram' the painter pushes the painting into a state of chaos or catastrophe in which he relinquishes control of clichéd representational forms. Deleuze described the 'diagram' as 'like the emergence of another world.' (Deleuze and Bacon 2003, 82)

Fig 4: Francis Bacon 'Self-Portrait' 1973
(http://oudemeesterschilderijen.wordpress.com/2013/06/01/francis-bacon/bacon-self-portrait-1973-jpg/)

One can imagine Bacon in his studio. He is unhappy with the state of an image, and wipes away applied paint. This process however does not totally remove the image; instead it introduces random elements. Deleuze states:

> These marks, these traits, are irrational, involuntary, accidental, free, random. They are nonrepresentative, nonillustrative, nonnarrative. They are no longer either significant or signifiers: they are a-signifying traits. (Deleuze and Bacon 2003, 82)

The key here is that these marks are no longer significant as signifiers. This is not to say that they are not significant in different ways. Sensation arises from the degree to which representational elements are removed. Interestingly, we can see in the self-portrait above that Bacon produces a cloud-like effect through his handling of paint. Bacon names the marks or traits that are produced by the Deleuzian 'diagram' as a 'graph', a graph of polysemic visual and interpretative possibilities. A clear definition of the graph, is given by Damisch:

> To speak of graphs, now, and no longer of signs, requires a change in register in order for us to get as close as possible to the work that leads from the *modus significandi* to the *modus operandi*, along the paths of abstraction: the work, graphic in its essence, through which one passes from the level of significance to that of operance, the accent bearing on the production of effects. The graph doesn't lead to any signified; in its very linearity, it is the vector of an operation.(Damisch 2009, 149)

What interests me is that the ambiguity introduced by the graph not only resists clear and direct communication through its avoidance of mimesis; it also opens up sensations that generate more polysemic readings. Moreover, the suspension of habitual recognition provokes the spectator to engage with the image in a new way — to in effect think *with* the image. The graph thus engenders a shift away from representation towards sensation that opens the experience of the painting to more latent and liminal qualities of thought.

Section 3:

Emergence, Abstraction and Latency

Emergence

> The fascinating thing about painting is that the result, reason and process of its production cannot be fully reduced to one another. … One might even say, that only when the relationship between result, reason and process is complex — and that means not susceptible to reduction to definite principles — is the painting good. (Verwoert 2005, 41)

Jan Verwoert's statement, from the essay *Emergence: On the painting of Tomma Abts*, asks how can we talk about painting when it thwarts traditional interpretative conventions used to examine the production and reception of such artworks? He states:

> Neither talk of intention nor talk of intuition can enable us to grasp that painting, as a result of its irreducible inner differentiation, produces its own form of rationality, which can be adequately described neither in the categories of instrumental reason, nor in those of mythical inspiration. (Verwoert 2005, 41)

Verwoert looks to the concept of 'emergence' to examine the irreducible qualities that can arise in painting. Looking into the etymological origins of the word he defines emergence as a) a process of becoming b) to work one's way out of a critical situation (he highlights the fact *that* a decision is made to resolve a crisis) c) a protrusion from a structure with many layers, and d) the special quality which a thing or organism possesses as a consequence of the complexity of its structure; the quality that makes the whole more than the sum of the parts. (Verwoert 2005, 42-3)

The act of painting necessarily involves decisions made by the painter. If the process of painting is to be more than the illustration of a pre-conceived idea, it is required that the act of painting is based upon responding to conditions established upon the canvas. (Verwoert 2005, 43-4) The processes that a painter employs create structures and a history embedded in the painting. This gives rise to what Verwoert calls 'criteria' through which the 'rationality of emergence' — which he equates as the 'rationality of painting' — can be 'comprehended to some extent.'(Verwoert 2005, 43-4)

In the case of Abts' paintings, the phenomenon of emergence exists in the surface of the canvas where the accumulation of different decisions (successive states or layers of paint) leave traces under the opaque paint of the final layer. Attention to such detail can be equated with a close reading or 'slow-looking', a situation in which the subtleties of the painting reveal themselves over the course of prolonged looking. These subtleties undo the initial impression of stasis that these painting can suggest and instead reveal the dynamics of the painting. As Verwoert states 'the forms that seemed so firmly established begin to melt down.'(Verwoert 2008a, 55) He adds:

> The emergent qualities of these pictures, the particular impression of a structure, which is animated by a subliminal, but nonetheless sustained dynamic instability, therefore arises precisely from the variability of the criteria used in the construction of the composition. (Verwoert 2008a, 55)

One aspect of Abts' abstraction that Verwoert highlights is her resistance to employing conventional 'codes' of abstraction. Like the breaking of primary codes that Bode mentions, Verwoert discerns in Abts' painting a rejection of two dominant rhetorical forms in post-war abstract painting: the grid and the

gesture.[4] (Verwoert 2008a, 53) The grid and the gesture are well-established forms in the history of abstract painting and as such constitute a stylistic law for painter and spectator. The absence of these rhetorical devices in Abts' paintings not only gives the spectator less to recognize or cling to, it encourages the viewer to analyse other aspects of Abts' painterly decisions.

Damisch, Deleuze, Bode and Verwoert all place the specificity of the artwork before a reductive analysis of the artwork's historical reading in its cultural moment. Like the kind of symptomology that Damisch employs in his theory of /cloud/, Verwoert's is an inductive method that does justice to the embodied nature of the symbolically significant and sensuous manifestations that painting presents.

Abstraction

The contemporary period has seen more problematic distinctions between abstraction and representation. This issue arises not so much from the fact that all painting, strictly speaking, is abstract, but rather that abstraction as a style has been integrated into a larger signifying economy as new generations of artists examine abstraction's history and work to challenge or play with its established conventions.

As Charles Bernstein points out in his essay 'Disfiguring Abstraction', 'Radical modernisms, as art histories and museum practices at their most dynamic, do not aim to purify but to plurify.' (Bernstein 2013, 497) As much a commentary on museum practices as it is on a history of abstraction, Bernstein's account of abstraction presents an alternative history and genealogy of abstraction. Bernstein seeks to reclaim what he sees as the driving principles of avant-garde

[4] Abts does however embrace one of the more common pictorial devices in contemporary abstract painting, namely a contrasting co-existence of pictorial illusion and surface materiality.

abstraction from what he considers the reifying tendencies of 'high museum abstraction'. He states:

> Avant-garde Abstraction was not an end in itself but a movement of art beyond the frame of the museum and of the reifications of art history … Framing Abstraction: high museum abstraction, as a patented brand of modernist art history, lobotomizes the most radical impulses of abstraction, let's call it para-abstraction, an antimimetic, non-representational, investigative art practice, something that complicates and reformulates — and even breaks free from — the reification of abstraction, even if this breaking free is imaginary. (Bernstein 2013, 496).

For example, Greenberg's formalism refused to accommodate the symbolic dimension of artists' intentions and denied an emotional response to American abstraction. The reductive and essentialist formulations of Greenbergian aesthetics, and what Bernstein names high museum abstraction, stands out as an anomaly in how abstraction has been more broadly been understood. Bernstein makes this point when he considered the creative spirit of early modernist abstraction:

> The radicalism of the (mostly) men of 1912-17 is not the articulation of nonfiguration — no matter how significant — but the process of moving in, about, and around nonfiguration. What's most radical, in other words, is the series of swerves, the defamiliarisation (ostranenie) that opens up a constellation of possibilities. … What's most radical is not the actualisation of 'pure abstraction' but the oscillation of figure and nonfigure, a fort-da of appearance and disappearance. (Bernstein 2013, 496)

Bernstein's assessment of abstraction relates closely to John Rajchman's writing on the subject. In his essay, *Another View of Abstraction* (1995) Rajchman argues from a Deleuzian perspective for an understanding of abstraction that does not

partake in the aesthetics of negation that Greenbergian formalism championed; engendered by 'a stripping away of all image, figure, story and content to reach the empty of flat canvas' (Rajchman 1995, 16) Instead, Rajchman describes an understanding of abstraction that aims to plurify; an abstraction:

> that consists of an impure mixture and mixing up, prior to Forms, a reassemblage that moves towards an outside rather than a purification that turns up to essential Ideas or in towards the constitutive 'forms' of a medium. (Rajchman 1995, 16)

Rajchman sees the 'abstract' use of a medium as not being purely self-referential but "when it starts to stammer 'and…and…and…' prior to message and transmission." (Rajchman 1995, 22) Rajchman thus rethinks 'abstract' thought as that which is involved in a generative process that makes new connection rather than as an aesthetic experience of negation. In terms of this research project I am interested in the 'in between' qualities of abstraction that defamiliarise or deterritorialise the viewer's interpretative faculties in order to open towards a more poetical and imaginative aesthetic experience.

Contemporary abstraction has entered into an expanded field, and Barry Schwabsky, in '*An Art of Transition*' (2010), highlights its blurring of the distinctions between abstraction and figuration:

> The fact that so many painters today are working along the broad and very porous border between abstraction and images is a sign that this boundary is, in itself, an object of great fascination. It's as if the potential for transition had become more urgent than identification with a fixed position. (Schwabsky 2010, 1)

This tendency towards transition not only exists at the level of practice — in a provisional approach toward painting practice and a willingness to shift between styles and methods of painting — it also has to do with imbuing

painting with a sense of visual ambiguity. In relation to this strategy Schwabsky discusses what art historian Dan Gamboni called 'potential images'. Gamboni describes these as:

> those established — in the realm of the virtual — by the artist but dependent on the beholder for their realisation, and their property is to make the beholder aware — either painfully or enjoyably — of the active, subjective nature of seeing. (Schwabsky 2010, 1)

Schwabsky sees this potential in the latent state of the image or abstraction as one that allows the painting to 'linger in the condition in which things are still unsettled, metamorphic, in transition.' (Schwabsky 2010, 1) In order to delve into these qualities in more detail I will now look at Jan Verwoert's writings on the latency of abstraction.

Latency

In later writings about Abts' practice, Verwoert's focus shifts to the latency that abstraction engenders. In his essay *The Beauty and Politics of Latency: on the work of Tomma Abts* (2008) he describes abstraction's performative agency. He sees that abstraction engenders in the viewer a temporal latency that operates in two simultaneous ways. One, tapping into latent memories and liminal associations, the other engaging the viewer's intuitive and imaginative faculties of creative thought to negotiate that which remains unknown. (Verwoert 2008b, 93) In this description we can see an affinity with the writing of Deleuze on Bergson's concept of Duration in which he speculates that:

> the 'present' that endures divides at each 'instant' into two directions, one oriented and dilated toward the past, the other contracted, contracting toward the future." (Deleuze 1991, 54)

Verwoert sees visual abstraction as the 'opposite of information' in the sense that one 'cannot own abstraction, you can only perform and experience it under the conditions and pace set by the particular nature of performance and experience itself'. (Verwoert 2008b, 92) Verwoert adds:

> By virtue of its singularity, this experience of abstraction interrupts the circulation of data. It creates a momentary release from the cycle of reproduction and dissemination and takes you to a different place where you see things, for an instant, in and for themselves: singular, particular, irreplaceable and un-exchangeable. (Verwoert 2008b, 92)

Verwoert believes the resistance of abstraction to the codes and laws of signification provides a recourse to, not only the speed of contemporary visual culture, but also (in his words) to the 'exclusive valorisation of actuality in the culture of high performance and information capitalism.' (Verwoert 2008b, 93) Rather than fitting into the cycle of reproduction and dissemination, Verwoert believes the slowing down of looking and comprehension that abstraction offers fosters a temporal latency. This can engender a shift in the intentionality with which we habitual look and encourage different ways of thinking and seeing the world.

Chapter 2: Exemplars

Cezanne – Marden

The dynamic qualities in Cezanne's late painting arise from a complex form of abstraction, which in part derives its force from his painting technique and from the unfinished qualities that he allowed to remain in his work. There are two elements in this unfinished quality. David Sylvester sees one of these qualities as related to the *non-finito* seen in Michelangelo's sculpture, and claims:

> The similarity is that both are about varying the degree to which form is made to *emerge* from vagueness into clarity … The essential is that the practice has to do with holding definition in reserve. One outcome is that we are brought face to face with the anxiety and drama of creation. (Sylvester 1997, 438)

The other element that contributes to the *non-finito* in these late works arises from Cezanne's focus on form (albeit an elusive form, as mentioned earlier) to the exclusion of narrative. Sylvester observes that if subject matter is present in these late works (for example the two enigmatic figures on the opposite shore in the Barnes Bathers, Fig. 5), Cezanne does not make them clearly identifiable. (Sylvester 1997, 439) In addition, the intermeshing of two figures on the right hand side of the painting creates a visual paradox, much like the slippage that occurs between Cezanne's studies of rocks and their cloud-like appearance (as mentioned in Chapter 2). Another visual paradox occurs in the emergence of a woman's face that occupies the full height of the canvas. Having spent four years working on this painting (the last and largest of the grand bathers), it is difficult to believe that Cezanne was unaware that the over arching tree trunks form the hair of a face, and the arms of the bathers in the foreground round out the chin.

Fig 5: Paul Cézanne, The Large Bathers, 1906, Oil on canvas, 82 7/8 x 98 3/4 inches
(http://www.public-domain-photos.org/paul-cezanne-the-large-bathers.html)

Cezanne's refusal to present a clear sense of narrative can be seen from a Deleuzian perspective as a way of destroying the clichés of representation that are the codes and laws of commonly agreed visual language. It therefore sets up a situation in which the viewer's 'will-to-meaning' is confounded and remains unsatisfied. In dealing with subject matter, yet not implying any story as to its context, Cezanne instils these paintings with a timeless and enigmatic quality.

Fig 6: Paul Cézanne Mont Saint Victoire (Pearlman)

Oil on Canvas c. 1902, 33 x 25 5/8 inches

(http://www.pearlmancollection.org/artwork/mont-sainte-victoire)

If we examine Cezanne's technique (fig 6) we can see how he employed subtle combinations via fragmented brushstrokes to form an underlying optical structure. This quality arises from Cezanne's attempts to create a sense of depth and movement within the picture plane in pursuit of his ultimate goal to create a 'harmony parallel with nature'. The edges of the brushstrokes have vectors, which combine and extend to form compositional lines. These compositional lines lead the eye and generate *passage* and multiple foci points. The compositional lines also encompass and emphasise the foci points. What results is a painting of extraordinary visual complexity in which subtle effects reconfigure and shift under one's gaze.

Cezanne's example dominated my ambitions as I began this research project. In seeking to shift my practice away from representation and landscape painting towards abstract painting it was the transitional qualities of *passage* (that I explained in chapter 2) that I wanted to retain. However, as I will show in the next chapter, this became less about the circulatory qualities of an all-over optical dynamism and more about the transitional qualities of *passage.* This is in terms of visual slippages and interpretative polyvalence that can engender a temporal dislocation in the spectator's viewing experience.

Marden

Fig 7: Brice Marden: *First Letter* 2006-2009 Oil on linen 96 x 144 inches; 244 x 366 cm (http://www.matthewmarks.com/new-york/exhibitions/2010-10-29_brice-marden/works-in-exhibition/ - /images/1/)

The late paintings of the American abstract painter Brice Marden share qualities in Cezanne's late oeuvre. This comes as no surprise as Marden has spoken of his appreciation of Cezanne. In Marden's *First Letter*, we can see that several layers of paint of varying intensity have been applied to the canvas. The strong contrasts between the dark and lighter lines against the cream ground contribute to an oscillating composition that generates a strong optical affect.

The ghost-like lines of the under painting are left to linger like afterimages, and add a sense of depth and interplay to the image. The two painted strips on the sides act like bookends that work to compress and contain the central area. Marden understands the function of this dynamic as one that keeps the eye moving. He accomplishes this via compositional devices.

While both Cézanne and Marden exhibit qualities resembling the 'dragon veins' mentioned in Chapter 2, there is a significant difference in how these qualities are manifested due to their respective methods. The individual lines of Marden's paintings converge and overlap to create larger networks. At times the trajectory of his line deviates or turns across an empty expanse and is met by another line section. These converging, overlapping, and deviating lines generate the optical dynamic of his compositions. This is the same kind of quality of circulation that Cezanne presented in his late works. Yet Cezanne did not always employ these compositional lines. In Cézanne's painting they are also implied between the patches of colour he applied.

Marden associates Cezanne's late paintings with the ancient Chinese Taoist understanding of landscape painting. This involves being *in nature* rather than the more western understanding of doing a painting *of nature*. (Ross, 2009) This is the same aesthetic that Marden brings to his painting. The movement and energy of Marden's paintings, like Cézanne's, draws our attention not only to the flux of nature, but also the flux of our perception. This is an experience of the as-it-happens rather than that of the detached observer. The optical dynamic and the *non-finito* in both Cezanne and Marden's artworks are qualities that lengthen and deepen the experience of the artwork. It is as if one never gets to the bottom of these works, regardless of how many times you return to them. This is an engagement I seek to produce in my own paintings.

Fig 8: Brice Marden: *2*
From *Etchings to Rexroth,*
1986, Etching and aquatint on paper, 203 x 174 mm
(http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/marden-2-p77209)

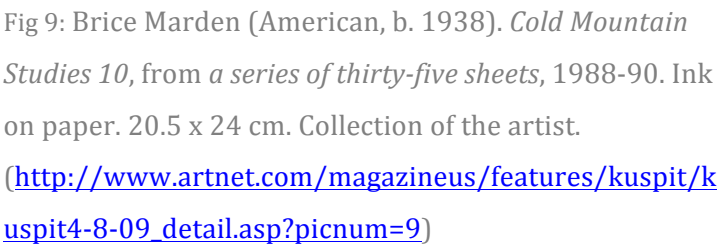

Fig 9: Brice Marden (American, b. 1938). *Cold Mountain Studies 10*, from *a series of thirty-five sheets*, 1988-90. Ink on paper. 20.5 x 24 cm. Collection of the artist.
(http://www.artnet.com/magazineus/features/kuspit/kuspit4-8-09_detail.asp?picnum=9)

Another aspect of Marden's graphic abstraction that is of interest to me is its relation to Chinese calligraphy and the ideograph. Marden took the ideographic form of the Chinese character and its use in Chinese poetic form as a model for his abstract works. The written form of Chinese characters inspires the 'diagram couplets' that Marden used to begin these early gestural works. (Fig 8) Marden cannot read or write Chinese characters so he used the 'diagram couplets' as evocative visual forms, which he used to develop larger visual fields. (Fig 9).

This method developed from his observations of the formal structures of Chinese poetry. This led Marden to understand the rhizomic structures in which Chinese poetry is made and read. The form presents itself as sets of couplets in which the characters are read not only in a linear sense (vertically from the top right to the bottom left), but also as tangential connections. For example, certain poets will construct the poem in an acrostic manner so that the characters that line up right to left across the top of the columns can be read as a sentence. This quality is known as 藏头诗 (cang tou shi), which translates as 'hidden head'. Another example is that the arrangement of the poem into couplets encourages a parallel reading of the two columns. In such instances the poet used the same

character or phrase in both columns to encourage the reader to compare and contrast the two columns. The fact that Chinese poetry is written in ideographic form with a brush lends great flexibility to the style in which the character is written. Poets would take advantage of this to generate visual rhythms between character and across poem structures. Marden drew on these qualities to develop his own work, as seen in the above study (Fig 9).

Marden draws his inspiration from a wide variety of sources including the muses of Greek mythology (Fig 10), Chinese landscape painting and calligraphy, Cézanne's *Mont Sainte-Victoire* (Fig 6), Han dynasty poetry, Tang dynasty dancing figurines (Fig 11), and nature. (Kertess, Marden and Whitney 1992)

Fig 10: The nine muses —on a Roman sarcophagus (2nd century AD, from the Louvre) (http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Muses_sarcophagus_Louvre_MR880.jpg)

Fig 11: Tang Dynasty figurines: (http://artmundus.wordpress.com/2012/04/13/tang-dynasty/)

Fig 12: Brice Marden *The Muses*, 1991-96; Oil on Linen (http://www.portlandart.net/archives/2007/05/stillness_into.html)

These sources are not overtly displayed, but exist as undercurrents that flicker through his paintings as a continuous refiguring of contoured lines. These open and close space and suggest figurative forms. (Fig 12) If one is familiar with the sources (Fig 10 and 11) from which Marden draws one can see how the rhythmic force of his abstractions can evoke memories and connections from a wide range of experience. These are evocations that draw, as Verwoert describes, on latent memory and liminal awareness. This movement of thought constitutes a '*passage*' of sorts. Not in the sense of a visual traversing of representational space but rather a conceptual one between associations. The *passage* that Marden generates in these works is a transitional one that generates qualities of /cloud/ in a rhizomic web of potentiality.

Doig – Bacon

Fig 13: Peter Doig 2000-2 *Gasthof zur Muldentalsperre* oil on canvas, 196 x 296 cm
(http://www.fotopedia.com/items/flickr-3579159784)

Peter Doig's paintings have an enigmatic, timeless quality. His art possesses a cinematic dream-like and semi-abstract figurative style that borders on magic realism. I am drawn to the quality of these works and his process of painting.

Doig often uses photographs as source imagery for his paintings. In developing *Gasthof zur Muldentalsperre* (Fig 13) Doig combined two figures (himself and a friend photographed on a stage set) with a nineteenth century postcard. However in working through and developing the painting he destroyed what Deleuze terms the 'sovereign optical organisation' of the cliché — which in this case is the pre-existing pictorial order and clarity of the source photograph.[5] He did this through a variety of methods. For example, the two trees flanking the image look unfinished. The form of the trees is in fact the underpainting or ground showing through a negative space in the image; we can even see some preliminary underpainting sketched here. What is interesting here is that in this unfinished state the trees become cloud-like (the left tree in particular) as they rise up towards the equally nebulous night sky. In this we can see an example of the qualities of /cloud/ at work. Not only does the tree pierce the surface of the illusion to reveal the underpainting, but it also becomes cloud-like and nebulous as it connects the foreground plane with the background sky.

The foreground, with fine mists of paint over it, is also cloudy. Moreover, thick white blobs of paint, seemingly flicked at the canvas, punctuate this area. These white blobs echo the starlight in the sky, its reflection on the water and to a lesser degree the large white patches on the dam wall. The visual effect here is quite strong. Through his application of paint Doig (in a manner similar to Cezanne) sets up a tension between the illusionistic space of the image and the surface materiality of the painting. These white blobs, dots and patches act as *graphs* that work to bring the foreground, mid-ground and background of the illusion into the one plane of the canvas surface. Symbolically speaking, the two figures at the gate of the wall also echo the visual dynamic between the painting

[5] The 'sovereign optical organisation' of landscape painting can most basically be understood in terms the ordering of the layers of paint in relation to planes of the image. The background planes would expected be painted first, then the mid-ground and finally the foreground.

as illusion and the painting as object. We are unsure as to whether they (the two figures) are a welcoming party or guarding the entry point.

The lesson I have gained from Doig is the way he employs alternative methods of the Deleuzian diagram (as described in chapter 2). This was especially pertinent at a time when both my landscape and abstract practices had become entrenched in systematic processes. Doig's 'diagram' involves a process that produces a movement away from rational painting. He uses successive and haphazard washes of oil paint that run and drip down the canvas, or flicks paint on to the canvas to create an organic misty patina. At other times negative space is used to indicate form. These processes involve a movement away from direct mimesis and the logic of illusionistic space (in this case the trees). The order of the pictorial planes are also obfuscated. All of these elements create a type of virtual space that when combined with the enigmatic subject matter is not easy to rationalise.

Bacon

Having already referred to Deleuze's *The Logic of Sensation* (1981) in chapter 2, I would now like to further discuss Deleuze's interpretation of Bacon in relation to Bacon's painting and processes. The following quote comes from David Sylvester's famous interviews held with Bacon between 1962-79. In them Bacon speaks of the difference between illustration and sensation:

> Can you analyse the difference, in fact, between paint which conveys directly and paint which conveys through illustration? This is a very, very difficult problem to put into words. It is something to do with instinct. It's a very, very close and difficult thing to know why some paint comes across directly to the nervous system and other paint tells you the story in a long diatribe through the brain. (Bacon in Sylvester 1980, 18)

Bacon was a painter who very much enjoyed what the materiality of paint has to offer. What he made paint do is remarkable. Bacon's concern with using the intensity and immediacy of paint to realise his sensations, made him a risk taker. Like a gambler, Bacon embraced accident and chance in his painting, and stated:

> I think that accident, which I would call luck, is one of the most important and fertile aspects of it, because, if anything works for me, I feel it is nothing I have made myself, but something which chance has been able to give me. But it's true to say that over a great many years I have been thinking about chance and about the possibilities of using what chance can give, and I never know how much it is pure chance and how much it is manipulated. (Sylvester 1980, 52)

This statement gives us insight into the oxymoron 'controlled chance' that is often employed to describe his painting. He scrubbed, wiped, scumbled, swept and flicked paint in order to attain an intensity of sensation. In doing so Bacon destroyed many of his canvases through overworking, as a gamble sometimes went wrong at a critical moment in the painting. However, it is through these processes that he attained the intensity that allows paint to be immediately affective rather than distantly comprehended. These processes are intrinsic to Bacon's 'diagram'.

If we return to Deleuze's *Logic of Sensation* and his exploration of the conditions for production of the new in painting, he identifies three major paths that seek to move painting beyond mimesis. These paths are abstraction, abstract expressionism, and Bacon's style. The criteria that Deleuze uses to differentiate these paths, relies upon the degree to which a painter engages with the 'diagram'. For Deleuze, what is of significance is how the artist negotiates this event and how (that is *if*) they emerge from it. (Deleuze and Bacon 2003, 84)

Using these three paths Deleuze describes the ways in which artists can avoid the clichés of representation. The first is via abstraction that operates in a purely

optical space. The example Deleuze gives here is Mondrian, whose process of painting effectively bypassed the catastrophe of the 'diagram'. Rather, it functions as a symbolic code 'on the basis of great formal oppositions'. (Deleuze and Bacon 2003, 84) The second refers to Abstract Expressionism or *art informel.* Here Deleuze focuses on Jackson Pollock's art in which the catastrophe of the 'diagram' covers the entire canvas and is embraced for the potential of its a-signifying materiality. Finally, he refers to Bacon's approach in which he deforms the figure thereby moving it away from mimesis towards pure sensation.

Fig 14: Francis Bacon, *Three Studies for a Crucifixion*, 1962, oil with sand on canvas, central panel of three, 198.1 x 144.8 cm each (Guggenheim Museum, New York) (http://www.fotosimagenes.org/imagenes/francis-bacon-pintor-4.jpg)

Unlike Pollock, Bacon does not let the diagram 'eat away at the entire painting'. (Deleuze and Bacon 2003, 89) Instead Bacon limits the deployment of the 'diagram' to certain areas of the image and to a particular moment in the painting process. In doing so he harnesses and intensifies the disjunctions between two types of painting. He does this by setting up an opposition between

the haptic vision of the graph/figure against a more purely optical vision using colour planes to represent a shallow pictorial space within which the figure is set. At times Bacon reinforces the isolation and intensity of the graph/figure by constructing geometric frameworks around the figure, or using objects like beds as a stage or altar.

Bacon's work, in light of Deleuze's interpretations in *Logic of Sensation*, made me reconsider the intentions and processes of my painting practice. The modes of painting that I had been engaging in were derived from Cezanne and Marden as I was seeking an 'all over' optical dynamic, but these methods soon became systematic and repetitive. My paintings and painting processes felt more like passive engagements, rather than offering a more engaging or challenging experience for myself as maker and spectator.

The shifts that subsequently occurred in my practice developed as a response to a number of issues uncovered in my research. Deleuze and Guattari's writing on the need for new images of thought and the conditions for the production of the new in painting made me reconsider the type of abstraction with which I was engaging. This led me to Deleuze's understanding of the 'diagram' as a paradigm that instigated a way of painting in which control and representation (representation in the sense of mimesis, but also in the sense of a repetition of abstract styles) was disrupted. Engaging with chaos allows escape from the clichés of the self, as much as clichés of representation. The chaos or catastrophe that the 'diagram' instigated also allowed unforseen events to take place in the painting process. Rather than prescribing or prefiguring meaning in the artwork, meaning arose from a reciprocal engagement between the artwork and the painting process.

The other outstanding aspect of Bacon's art for my own painting practice was his ability to isolate form and the diagram to particular areas and specific moments in the process of painting. While this represents a classical dyadic relationship between figure and ground, the difference in the handling of the figure (the limiting of the diagram to the figure) works to undermine its representational

qualities. Thus, pushing it towards a sensation that works viscerally rather than through processes of cognition. The tensions in the coexistence of rational and irrational painting and optical and haptic vision can be very powerful.

The idea of the dealing with abstract elemental forms and their figure/ground relations interested me because it required a more challenging engagement than the earlier systematic processes I had employed in the past. The other possibility that interested me was using the 'diagram' (irrational, uncontrolled painting) and chance to generate elemental visual forms rather than narrative driven, literal and illustrative paintings. I will examine these issues further in relation the abstract visual form the following sections of this chapter.

Lasker - Guston

Two painters that pointed the way forward with respect to developing an elemental abstract visual language were Philip Guston and Jonathan Lasker. Lasker's importance lies in the nature of his post-modern meta-abstraction. In the late 70s Lasker began developing his art in response to the 'end of painting' narrative initiated by Greenbergian formalism and conceptualism. He sought cogent ways to initiate painting again, and in reflecting upon this period he has said:

> For me the issue was how could you paint your way back into subject matter, yet at the same time still have a picture which is self-reflexive … a painting that stresses itself as a material object, yet also engages the metaphor of picture-making. (Lasker in Bernstein, 2009)

Lasker's painting seeks to move forward with respect the romantic understanding of abstraction — as an appeal to universal principles — by focusing upon its epistemological and syntactical reading. He describes two main discourses operating in his work, "one is the discourse of visual language as signification and the other discourse pertains to issues of painting space."

(Lasker in Bernstein, 2009) These discourses revolve around epistemological understandings of painting or the 'mechanics of seeing'. (Hobbs 2012, 6) Lasker plays with the genre of abstraction in several ways in order to disrupt the codes and laws of visual interpretation. Firstly, there is a delicate balance between abstraction and referentiality in the forms he chooses to employ. Referentiality here, is not only intuited by the imagination of spectator, but also encoded in his appropriation of other styles of painting. However, rather than presenting a simple juxtaposition of appropriated styles, he integrates them to create idiosyncratic, paradoxical paintings.

Fig 15: Jonathan Lasker *Arcane Reasoning*, 1989 Oil on canvas 90 x 105 in (http://bombsite.com/issues/30/articles/1276)

Lasker plays with the syntactical arrangement of the abstract forms he generates in both pictorial and material space. He heightens these qualities by creating differences in the material density between different types of painting within the same image. A good example of this can be seen in the painting above where two parts have been rendered in thick oil paint. The first, a large area bottom centre left, has been painted over a thinly painted black and orange ground (which implies a conjoined background and mid-ground space in its

graphic rendering of pen on paper). This reads like a flame burning through the surface of the image. The other area of thick paint - the red, yellow and blue vertically aligned glyphs at the top right, reads firmly as an inscription on the surface. Yet the differing scale of the black abstract inscriptions disrupts this reading. This gives the impression that the smaller of these is further receded in the pictorial space of the painting. Thus, the smaller red, yellow and blue inscription could be read as floating in 'pictorial' space between the two black inscriptions. However, this is not possible given that the thick paint constantly reaffirms its presence on the surface of the canvas. Moreover, the painting's title *Arcane Reasoning* gently mocks attempts to make any sense of the image within traditional pictorial terms. What results is a paradoxical and irreconcilable reading between the depicted space of the illusion and the actual materiality of the painting.

Lasker shares Bacon's concern with using colour and the material differentiation of paint to generate an intensity of sensation. One key difference in their approach is that Lasker has developed a method in which he uses a maquette painting system from which to construct large-scale abstract paintings. His large-scale paintings therefore seem meticulously planned. This process emerges from notebook drawings where line and figure components are developed from doodling and surrealist modes of automatic drawing. The only 'diagram' (in its Deleuzian understanding) that Lasker employs occurs in his studies. As Lasker scales up the size of his paintings from smaller maquettes expressionistic elements are also scaled up and copied. However the scaling up of some of these abstract elements totally changes how they are created. What was a simple and relatively spontaneous act of painting becomes a labour intensive and time-consuming process. This re-inscription of painterly processes from the expressionistic inscription to the "gesture made dispassionate" changes the reading of the abstract element and helps keep the painting in an open and self-questioning state. (Stuart Cumberland, 2011).

Fig 16: Jonathan Lasker *Symbolic Farming* 2001 oil on linen 152.4 x 203.2 cm (http://maximememoirevive.blogspot.com.au/2013/06/les-titres-de-jonathan-lasker.html)

As mentioned earlier, Lasker's treatment of symbolic levels also interests me. What I like about Lasker's elemental abstract language is that his abstraction of the forms are not only ambiguous, but also elevate symbolic relationships between forms. The above painting is a good example of this. Here we can see three distinct types of elemental form: the two black flat shapes top right and bottom left are like scribble in-filled forms, the more numerous thick impasto black on white glyph-like forms, and the two coloured patchwork forms that have been painted in thin paint over the thickly handled black and white glyphs. The shape of the two forms at the top of the canvas, echo one another, yet their material densities are opposed. Likewise, the two coloured patchwork forms resemble the shape of other forms in the painting. These suggest that Lasker is making explicit how we register patterns of recognition and difference.

Lasker's lexicon of abstract elements is employed to challenge the viewer's conventional frames of reference. This is the key to the operation of Lasker's painting and relates to the suspension of recognition that I am seeking to develop within my artworks. The balancing of the dichotomy between the

object-hood of the painting – its self-referential nature - and metaphor developed through the relationship of the elements is maintained so that neither come to dominate the viewer's perception. (Lasker 2009) His use of discursive and syntactical abstraction also targets the epistemological foundations of how we view paintings. Yet the ambiguity of forms allows for symbolic and metaphorical allusion to be generated without becoming overly referential. These qualities are aligned with the latency and potentiality of abstraction that Verwoert speaks about. Lasker's example informs my thinking about what I am trying to do within my own painting.

Guston

When Philip Guston made a mid-career shift from gestural abstraction to figuration his change in artistic direction was received by many as a betrayal of the abstract movement. In truth however Guston returned to issues that he had dealt with in his early career. During the early to mid 1960s Guston managed two parallel drawing practices that were concerned with abstraction and figuration. Gradually the figurative drawings came to dominate and Guston developed a personal lexicon of objects common to him: shoes, nails, books, clocks, cigarettes and light bulbs. In his last major canvases Guston presented enigmatic images in a comic-like style, yet did so with a formal integrity that he drew from classical renaissance painting. (Godfery 2000, 22) Tony Godfrey argued that Lasker and Guston both used a cartoon or comic-like graphic style, but arrived at a processional monumentality that imbues the paintings with a formal integrity and gravitas.

Fig 17: Philip Guston, *Evidence*, 1970, oil on canvas, 191.14 cm x 290.2 cm (http://www.sfmoma.org/explore/collection/artwork/141)

Guston drew inspiration from a wide variety of sources. In his late work these sources become very personal, and often depicted the surrounds of his studio. Often we can see the painter alone in the studio, face to face with the dilemmas of creation, and by extension, reflecting on the human condition. The building blocks of his art: a nail, a shoe, a clock, cigarettes, lie scattered around. Each playing a symbolic role in the lexicon of forms he presents.

In his recent essay *Thomas Nozkowski and Philip Guston Talk to Each Other Without Knowing It* (2013), John Yau examines the consonance between these two artists (figured below).

Fig 18: Philip Guston, *"Untitled 1980.* (http://hyperallergic.com/73473/thomas-nozkowski-and-philip-guston-talk-to-each-other-without-knowing-it/)

Fig 19: Thomas Nozkowski, *"Untitled (9-21)"* (2012), oil on linen on panel, 22 x 28 in (http://hyperallergic.com/73473/thomas-nozkowski-and-philip-guston-talk-to-each-other-without-knowing-it/)

Firstly, Yau examines the operation of these paintings in the way that they reveal themselves slowly. In Guston's painting we see a large boulder on an incline, though we also see a foot emerging from what could be a giant run away snowball. One commentator, Byran De Roo suggests that Guston's imagery relates to Sisyphus pushing the rock uphill, which is a metaphor for the act of painting: 'Every painting being a rock the painter must push up a hill once again only to be crushed and subsumed by it in the process, unsure if the pinnacle has or will ever be reached.' (De Roo in Yau 2013) There is however, a wry mixture

of resignation and hope in Guston's painting. The sun peeks out bright and joyful from behind the boulder and the horizon. It acts like a wedge or chock stopping the rock from further descending down the hill and seems to say: 'tomorrow is a new day.'

In Nozkowski's work we see two circular forms on an incline, however these have been created in a negative space via the over-painting of the dark area above and around them. The forms seem relatively distinct, but when examined closely they seem to dissolve into one another. The larger form begins to blend into the dark area that reads as a background or night sky. Yau states that in Nozkowski's painting there is a:

> feeling of solitude (the separateness of the abutted forms), tenderness (the one shape partially embracing the other), peril and determination (the slant of the horizon), and vulnerability (the black devouring ground) that are there to be unpacked through looking. (Yau 2013, 3)

Yau argues that these two painters share an interest in the processes of 'beginning to see'. To support this contention he quotes Guston's comments about Piero Della Francesca's *Flagellation of the Christ* in Dore Ashton's *Yes, But* (1976):

> It continues to provoke infinite questions about what is being seen. You can spend your life puzzling out what the actual intentions of a picture like that are. We are at the beginning of seeing. (Yau 2013, 3)

It is with this quality in mind that I would like to further examine the work of Thomas Nozkowski and Raoul De Keyser.

Nozkowski - De Keyser

Fig 20: Thomas Nozkowski, *Untitled (7-105)* (1997), oil on canvas and board, 22″ x 28″ (http://citysociety-blog.blogspot.com.au/2010/05/artist-thomas-nozkowski.html)

American abstract artist Thomas Nozkowski is a process painter. His inspiration and sources range from 'events, things, ideas — anything. Objects and places in the visual continuum … but also from other arts and abstract systems.' (Yau 2010, 1) Nozkowski's curiosity towards painting and its history is worth quoting at length:

> One of the reasons I love painting, this singular thing, is the communal part of it, all sorts of people in different times and places, all trying to catch and hold some part of the visual continuum, all of them doing the same thing, no matter the context. It all gets most interesting when you free the artists' essential work from their cultural context. It all becomes grist for the mill and then the next artist and on and on. And there's the big question of why you look at this and I look at that, you know – are we really seeing the same thing? Or do we really see

> colour the same way? Do we see shapes the same way? Do we understand scale the same way? And painting is a way to battle that out, to try and work out the possibilities, the meaning of visual knowledge. (Nozkowski in Yau 2012, 10-11)

Nozkowski's enthusiasm points to a commitment to explore a work's potential to evolve, and to elicit new interpretations and insights on a continual basis. Like many post-modern painters he does not participate in the 'death of painting' narrative, rather there is an open attitude towards exploring the on-going possibilities of painting. He believes that it is important to explore an idea in painting and see where it goes, rather than simply illustrate an idea.

Fig 21: Thomas Nozkowski *Untitled* 2006 Aquatint, etching and dry point 27.4 x 34.3 cm (http://www.artslant.com/global/artists/show/15381-thomas-nozkowski)

Nozkowski actively employs familiar structures and forms in painting, while simultaneously undermining these forms. In the print figured above we can see how he sets up three different readings of formal elements: there are flat squares that sit pictorially on the surface of the painting, a step-like like element that implies a spatial recession, and a smooth banded section that reads like underpainting that shows through a gap in the ground. This creates (as with Lasker) a dichotomy between the depicted space of the painting and the surface of the painting-as-object. This double vision of illusion and material surface creates a confounding kind of space, and presents a quandary of sorts for the viewer. (Yau 2012, 8)

Nozkowski engages with the authority of the grid in order to challenge it. He plays with the syntax of these constructions and works to undermine their structures. In doing so, he challenges the conventional and dominant codes and laws of visual interpretation. He has claimed:

> I like paintings that look clear and simple at first glance and then sort of crumble under your gaze. And it's even better if further looking enables you to put it together again, understanding it in a new way. (Nozkowski in Yau 2012, 9)

This experience of the image crumbling under one's gaze can be associated with the slippages of Damisch's /cloud/ and the transitional understanding of *passage* that I have described in relation to the works of Cezanne and Marden. It is also connected to Lasker's interest in the mechanics of seeing. The key to Nozkowski's, and Lasker's abstraction is the fine balance they achieve between pure abstraction and referentiality. Accordingly, their work presents a form that plays with the syntax of the codes, laws and structures of abstraction. What I also appreciate about Nozkowski's paintings is the worked quality that is retained from the process of making. The transparent layers he uses reveal the underpainting and develop an embodied history that adds a perceptual depth to the images

De Keyser (1930 – 2012)

In the early 1960s Raoul De Keyser began painting the vista outside his window, and a recurring motif was a soccer pitch adjacent to his house. What began however as a series of loosely handled representational paintings gradually became more abstract, cropped and minimal. In these early works, De Keyser artfully played the field of painting, testing its conventions while exploring the thresholds between representation and abstraction. His deconstructed

depictions of emblematic, everyday subject matter such as the soccer field, clothesline, or a tap, stretched the image to the limits of its referential capability. De Keyser's example has been important for me in the way he pares back representation in order to access a more open type of abstraction.

I most appreciate De Keyser's late works as these are small, intimate and casual. There is a looseness to his handling of paint in these late works that can on first impression read as careless or amateur. This quality has earned him a place in Raphael Rubenstein's grouping of Provisional Painting. Rubenstein quotes Barry Schwabsky on these qualities:

> Slapdash handling gradually begins to seem surpassingly sensitive — or is it? The grubby colour, fresh and beautiful calibrated — but is it, really? The sense of doubt never quite goes away. (Rubenstein 2009, 124)

The sense of doubt that Schwabsky refers to permeates De Keyser's paintings in ways that go beyond issues of perceived painterly skill. Schwabsky observes that De Keyser's paintings do not seem to address any of the major issues in contemporary painting:

> Although not programmatically abstract nor based on reduction to the monochrome or the mechanisation of the painting process, neither does it evince any special fixation on the medium's relation to the photographic image, popular culture, the readymade, or linguistic signification. (Schwabsky 2004, 240)

Fig 22: Raoul De Keyser Hide 2007 Oil on Canvas 36 x 43 cm
(Image can be seen in Raoul De Keyser: Replay 2010)

What is interesting about De Keyser's oeuvre is that there seems to be an indifference to the topical issues that dominate the contemporary discourse of painting. One reason for his avoidance of critical signposts could be that he does not wish to set the painting within a narrative that directs our interpretative antenna.

Another quality that Rubenstein attributes to provisional painting is that it is major painting masquerading as minor painting. Here Rubenstein evokes Deleuze and Guattari's *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature* in which they examine Kafka writing in a minor German dialect rather than the locally dominant Czech language or standard German. Here, minor language works to break down (to deterritorialise) the cultural bestowed meanings and inbuilt biases that a major language inherently holds. Rubenstein describes such minor paintings as at times coming:

> off as uncertain, incomplete, casual, self-cancelling or unfinished, but each of them is fully committed to the project of painting. If they break existing, perhaps unspoken, contracts with painting, it is only in order to draw up other protocols that will renew the medium. (Rubenstein 2009, 134)

De Keyser's work has very different ambitions to that of a painter like Lasker. While a sense of irony pervades both painters' work, Lasker produces what can be considered critically as major paintings, they are calculated and pitch perfect. There feels no sense of risk in his works. De Keyser's on the other hand, are considerably low-key, but his motivations are clear:

> In the end, above all I want to paint mercilessly, I hope that people notice there is more mercilessness in my work than usually assumed. That can only intensify people's emotions and increase their involvement. (Dewulf, 2009, p.60)

This is quite a curious statement from someone who paints small abstract pictures. However I believe it goes to the heart of what is particular about De Keyser's painting. One gets the feeling that his mercilessness is directed at the dominant critical discourse surrounding painting.[6] Nozkowski reveals a similar bent when he states in an interview that he tries:

> to come up with more improbable things to paint, what can't you paint? What shouldn't you paint? What would be really stupid to paint? And, what kind of devices are bankrupt? What kind of devices are so disgusting that no one would want to look at them? (Green 2013)

In De Keyser's case, he felt no compulsion to give his painting the resolved finish that one might expect from a life's worth of experience in honing one's art. In fact, he did the exact opposite. He pared his paintings back to see how much they can tolerate before becoming critically inconsequential. The lack of visual and critical bearings to guide us in the reception and interpretation of these painting seems to point to De Keyser questioning of what constitutes critical authority in the discourse of abstract painting.

---

[6] I see in De Keyser attitude has some affiliation with Miro's anti-painting stance in the 1930s.

On close inspection the sensitivity and subtlety in these late works is quite extraordinary. Like the close reading Verwoert employs in his analysis of Abts' work — in which the initial impression of stasis dissolves as one reads the history embodied in the work — a close reading of De Keyser's late works reveals that the appearance of causal handling in these paintings belies a nuanced sensitivity.

Fig 23: Raoul De Keyser: *Love* 2007 Oil and Mixed Media on Canvas Mounted on Wood 17.5 x 21 cm
(Image can be seen in Raoul De Keyser: Replay 2010)

De Keyser's mastery resides in his ability to convey an elusive nature to his paintings. This quality arises not only from his balance of abstraction and figuration. It is also connected to his avoidance of the strategic issues that (as Schwabsky mentions) dominate abstraction today. He thus manages to evade interpretive over-determination. De Keyser creates an open type of abstraction that gives access to the types of latency and potentiality that Verwoert sees abstraction capable of producing. There is no grand narrative in De Keyser's oeuvre; instead, we see a nuanced and refined art that wryly questions painting's authority, progress and telos.

Chapter 3: Studio

Section 1: Old habits die hard

The first 18 months of this research project involved a period of experimentation during which I was moving my painting practice in a new direction. My focus during this period was to explore interstitial spaces between figurative representation and abstraction. As mentioned in the previous chapters, this idea developed from my interest in the qualities of *passage* and transition in Cezanne's and Marden's late paintings. My previous painting had maintained two parallel practices in landscape and abstract painting. These were predicated on the qualities of a circulatory optical dynamism as mentioned in chapters 2 and 3. I was also working towards breaking down the space of representation, which was informed by Cezanne; and developing an emergent abstract-figurative space as influenced by Marden. These qualities somewhat dominated the early stages of my research inquiry. As the title of this section suggests, I found my habitual modes of production were not easy to change. I initially wanted to develop some sort of synthesis of these two types of painting to generate a polyvalent abstract-figurative space.

My first attempts towards this goal produced a range of experimental paintings that were used to generate new processes of making. Inspired partly by Lasker's elemental forms and Bacon's figural qualities, this involved working in oils (Fig 25), acrylics, watercolours and ink (Fig 24) on paper or canvas. I would document these works and rework them in Photoshop.

Fig 24: *Untitled* 2010 ink and acrylic on paper 30 x 20 cm

Fig 25: *Untitled* 2010 oil on canvas 91 x 76 cm

The difficulties I encountered at this stage resulted from trying to resolve the two conflicting forces operating within my practice. On one hand I was trying to develop new processes in a manner that felt authentic and meaningful, but this was inhibited by the anxiety associated with exploring completely new areas (both from a practical perspective and a theoretical one). During the early stages of the PhD there is considerable pressure to articulate a clear understanding of what one is doing, and much of this pressure can be self-generating. These challenges led to a capitulation of sorts in my studio practice, a falling back into my comfort zone to processes that I had been working with before I began my research project. Accordingly, I focused on developing my earlier processes of tessellated abstract painting into a more dynamic process. This involved starting to mark passages through grid tessellations that I was using as the ground for the net-like abstract works, and I began to interweave these bands.

Fig 26: *Untitled* 2010 oil on canvas 71 x 61 cm (Photograph: Carl Warner)

Fig 27: *Untitled* 2011 oil on canvas 91 x 76 cm

I experimented with the materiality of paint, and at times used thin washes of transparent paint that would run. (Fig 26) At other times I used the brushstroke in heavy impasto to reflect light off the paint at different angles (an effect that shifts as one moves around the painting). I also scratched back into the wet paint to create lines to reveal interesting forms in the under painting. (Fig 27) These new processes were becoming more fluid and responsive, yet I felt that the overall effect of the paintings had not changed much. Their dynamic was still of a type presenting a circulatory, 'all over' optical effect within a uniform field. Sometimes figures would emerge in these fields, but with no context or grounding.

It was around this time that my thinking about what I wanted from my painting processes and the qualities of the finished paintings started to change. My readings of Deleuze & Guattari from the *Logic of Sensation*, Simon O'Sullivan's *Art Encounters Deleuze and Guattari: Thought Beyond Representation,* and Stephen Zepke's *Art as Abstract Machine*, plus the lessons learned from Lasker and Bacon's paintings, made me think about the role that recognition of form plays in how we look and think. The abstract paintings I was making also began to feel like an empty kind of engagement. What was lacking for me, not only in

the process of making, but also in the final image was a challenging engagement with painterly concepts. I felt the need to engage with language and ideas within the processes of painting, but I wanted to do so without allowing the paintings to become narrative driven, literal or illustrative. I begin to think about the symbolic dimensions of form and their relationships, and to create forms that were ambiguous rather than readily recognisable.

The other aspect of this shift in perception of my painting practice was that I began to understand Deleuze's clichés of the self. I came to see that my fixation on a particular narrative in my own painting, along with its systematic processes, involved a type of re-presentation. Not only in the sense of re-presenting a certain type of painting that Marden had done, but also to continually re-present the abstract tessellation paintings with minor variations.

My first period of research concluded with the production of the two paintings illustrated below. Both were breakthrough paintings for me. When I was painting these it was as if I was moving beyond my earlier processes, painterly logics and systems. I now found myself in a new open and intuitive space.

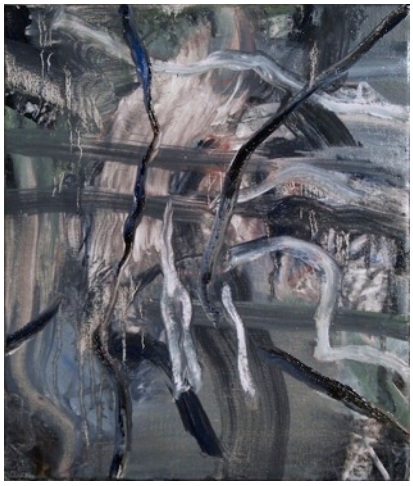

Fig 28: *Untitled* 2011 oil on linen
40 x 35 cm

Fig 29: *Untitled* 2011 oil on canvas 91 x 76 cm
(Photograph: Carl Warner)

These were strange paintings to me at the time. They seemed raw and somewhat violent. I didn't know how to talk about them or where the new directions might lead. Yet I knew that they were a step in the right direction. In hindsight, this moment in my research project proved to be a major breakthrough. On one hand this happened quite quickly, as the process of painting these two paintings occurred easily. However, coming to intellectual terms with this development in my painting practice was a slower process. Over the course of the next few months I paused my creative practice to attend to theoretical questions concerning my research topic that had been raised in my confirmation. This allowed me to gain some perspective on the developments that had occurred in my practice and research.

The key to the success of these paintings, for me, was the letting go of my go-to painterly devices and crutches and abandoning myself to the process. As a consequence, a more relaxed manner with the brush was acquired when developing my abstract tessellation paintings (Fig 26) into a more dynamic painterly process (Fig 28). As I mention in chapter 3, this was inspired by the work of Doig and Bacon and also Deleuze's writings on the 'Diagram' and the Catastrophe. The work in Fig 28 was more directly informed by Bacon as I employed wet into wet paint, paint rags and turps or paint loaded brushes that were worked back into the paint surfaces. Instead of going for an all-over uniform field that I had been using in the tessellated works, I returned to an opening of the planes of the picture as in my first works in the research project (Fig 24 and 25). Separating the planes allowed the picture to breathe and for new figure/ground readings to occur.

Of the two paintings Fig 29 has proven to be the more important painting. However it was the loose handling of paint that I used in Fig 28 that led to Fig 29. The important aspect of what emerged in Fig 29 was that I had started to isolate more distinct forms in the image. This developed as a result of my interest as mentioned in chapter 3 in Bacon and Lasker, and the dialectical space they set up in their paintings. While the material element in my painting is not as distinct, the isolation of abstract form set up fertile figure/ground relationships. The

hollow shape at the centre of the image was at once something and nothing, an opening and an adumbration. This form needed reinforcement so I gave it a shadow, which acted to substantiate the form, yet allowed it to float. This simple discovery was like a prize or treasure, and the form seemed delightful and ebullient in its ambiguity and formlessness. The five marks at the top were added to enhance this liveliness, but may also be interpreted as Guston-esque eyes of 'others' questioning or judging this form.

Significantly, in these works I managed to adopt a more spontaneous and inventive approach to painting. Freeing myself from the constrained position of the systematic processes I had developed in the abstract tessellation painting allowed me to expand my painting horizons and to more freely explore the possibilities of abstraction. The fact that this shift had developed through my practice rather than through the appropriation of painterly styles felt more authentic. This allowed me to credit these new paintings as more substantial than earlier experiments. Importantly, Fig 29 was also more challenging for me to interpret; it suggested some kind of subject matter, yet remained unexplained and enigmatic.

Section 2: Between chance and intention. Isolating the diagram

During my second period of research I worked at developing and building upon the lessons learned in the last two paintings mentioned above. In order to explore these ideas I began working on small wood marine ply panels 48 x 40 cm. These panels had a number of advantages. They provided a stable, firm and smooth structure to paint upon, and were quick and easy to prepare. The smooth finish to the priming also allowed the paint to be easily moved around the surface, while the hard support provided resistance to the brush and the painting could be easily wiped or scraped off. The small scale also allowed me to quickly and sometimes dramatically change the state of these works. This led to a more dynamic painting process in which I worked the paintings in parallel and successive stages.

Turning this method to abstract painting was partly inspired by the smaller scale work of Nozkowski and De Keyser. Other painters that I respect, such as Tomma Abts and Tom Burckhardt work in a similar manner on smaller scale panels. What I appreciate about all of these artists is the breadth of painting they cover in their practice. I consider the exploratory approach these artists adopt as rhizomic. By this I mean that each time they begin the process of painting it is to see how it can be done differently. What results is a range of distinct paintings, rather than a series of paintings with minor variations.

Fig 30: *Untitled* 2011 oil on board
48 x 40 cm (Photograph: Carl Warner)

Fig 31: *Untitled* 2011 oil on board
48 x 40 cm (Photograph: Carl Warner)

Over the next months I worked at developing more freestyle painting processes and I eventually freed myself from the triangular tessellations that I had been using as an under-drawing or under-painting framework (Fig 30 and 31). Figure-ground relationships and their reversal through negative space came into play as a shallow pictorial field replaced the earlier all-over patterning (Fig 33). A key understanding that developed here was the balancing of referentiality that I discuss in relation to the abstract painters in Chapter 3. I wanted to establish a sufficient sense of readability so the spectator could gain a visual foothold in the paintings that would trigger liminal and latent associations. I was careful not to allow this reading to become overly literal, illustrational or narrative-driven. When introducing and isolating figurative elements I became increasingly aware

of particular symbolic relationships that I was setting up within these images. This emerged not only from the ambiguous and liminal nature of the forms, but also from a better understanding of what constituted the signifying and symbolic registers of the syntactical space of abstract pictorial composition.

Fig 32: *Untitled* 2011 oil on board
48 x 40 cm (Photograph: Carl Warner)

Fig 33: *Untitled* 2011 oil on board
48 x 40 cm (Photograph: Carl Warner)

The other element that I focused upon during this period was the level of intentionality with which a mark, form, element or 'graph' is made and how it is employed within the overall composition. By intentionality I am referring to the amount of rational and pre-mediated control one employs within the process of painting. The converse of this is the amount of chance one allows in the process of mark making. An example of abstract form being used intentionally can be seen in Jonathan Lasker's approach:

> The idea of the dichotomy of the work being both the thing unto itself and also reflecting on a metaphorical condition has always been the primary goal. But then there is always a lot of other subject matter that comes into the paintings. A lot of visual vocabulary and discursive themes. There is the idea of the hand. And also the idea of automatic mark making, yet automatic mark

> making with preconceived boundaries within the form. *One does something that is a random mark, yet has a finite definition of what it will be used for in a pictorial function*. There is also something of creating a perfect matrix in the background and marring it with a mark, thereby being invasive into that system. (Lasker 2009, interview)

If we recall Lasker's process and the important role his small macquettes play in the planning of his large works we can see how his painting involves very conscious and considered insertions of form.

Fig 34: *Untitled* 2012 oil on board
48 x 40 cm (Photograph: Carl Warner)

Within my own painting practice I began to explore different levels of intention in regards to the forms I was using and the syntax that resulted from this. In the painting above I made a deliberate and clear inscription into the image. (Fig 34) Working the yellow area of the image I scratched a triangle back into the paint with the end of the brush. This geometric shape broke the sensuous (though somewhat impure) space of the yellow, and had the effect of inserting an ideal form into an abstract field. The triangle seemed like a piece of glass in the sand that pierced the picture plane, or was even like a self-imposed wound.

The other type of painting I was exploring at this time was the 'random' mark that is not pre-figured or worked out in advance, but rather, like Bacon's 'graph', occurs spontaneously using total or controlled chance. This is a state in which, as Deleuze says, the painting is 'in advance' of the painter. At times the chance of happenstance makes the form inimitable and unrepeatable. What occurs in this process is that the mark is made and is then assessed and interpreted. While both of these types of painting — the planned mark and the spontaneous mark — require as a maker and a viewer interpretation after the fact, these two types of painting result in different temporal experiences; different speeds of painting, different intensities and different expression. For me what was important was negotiating these two types of mark making and how they could be used in their symbolic and syntactical registers.

Fig 35: *Untitled* 2012 oil on board
48 x 40 cm (Photograph: Carl Warner)

Fig 36: *Untitled* 2012 oil on board
48 x 40 cm (Photograph: Carl Warner)

The two images above are of paintings that were resolved largely through intuitive gestures. Another interest at this time was engaging the Deleuzian 'diagram' or engaging the catastrophe in order to generate abstract forms that held a visual ambiguity and thus engendered interpretative polysemy. My thinking at this time revolved around determining the distinction between the readable and the visible or the level of referentiality the forms of the painting

held. These issues arose from my conception of visual transitions, slippages and polysemy that I traced with Damisch's /cloud/ and Bacon's graph (as mentioned in chapter 2 and 3). These qualities are seen in the works of abstract painters Nozkowski and De Keyser (as I have mentioned in chapter 3) and their example have also played a considerable role in helping me to develop my strategies and approach towards abstraction. However, I see the use of the Deleuzian 'diagram' in my painting as differing from the more controlled painting processes of Lasker, Nozkowski and De Keyser. By allowing chance to play a greater role in my painting practice I have come to a better understanding of provisionality in painting.

During this period I also began to consider how I would exhibit these works. I had panels lying on the floor or propped up against the wall and would rotate them through the easel or work on them on the floor. Through the process of working on the paintings the 12mm side of the panel became part of the painting as the brush would catch the edge or paint would run off the side. These margins read like strata in a geological sense, but also made me more aware of the painting as an object. Wanting to reinforce this quality I float mounted the panels so they would sit off the wall when hung. (Fig 37)

Fig 37: *Untitled* 2012 oil on board
48 x 40 cm

I held two exhibitions during this second research period. These provided valuable experience in arranging and seeing them as a body of work in a public space. The first of these exhibitions titled *Semblance* was held at the Art Factory Gallery in late 2011. In it I exhibited 24 small oil paintings, all 48 x 40 cm, mostly portrait format. The second exhibition was held at Jan Manton Art Gallery in mid 2012. (Fig 38) All of the paintings in these exhibitions (as with my final exhibition) are labelled 'Untitled'. This is to avoid the prescription of any specific intention or meaning to the work. During the installation process I decided to separate paintings that were similar or related somehow in content, process or style. This decision in part was motivated by the desire to break habits of perception that can occur when we look at similar objects; we tend to automatically see them as the same.[7] The contrasts that are then set up between adjacent paintings and the dialogues that are set up across the room provide a reading that extends beyond the individual work. Both exhibitions provided the valuable opportunity to see the works hung outside the studio, to examine the dialogues that were being to emerge between different types of abstraction and receive feedback from others on their feelings about the paintings.

[7] This is a difficult distinction to make as two paintings that are similar can also draw the spectator to examine the subtle difference between them or used strategically to raise the issue of repetition. I my case I want to strongly contrast difference (albeit within the narrow range of conventional abstract painting I am presenting).

Fig 38: Solo Exhibition 2012 Jan Manton Art Gallery, Spring Hill, Brisbane

Section 3: Exploration

My final research period began after my exhibition in mid-2012. After a break from painting, which enabled me to reflect and examine what had occurred over the preceding research period (section 2), I started painting for my final examination exhibition. This entailed starting with the smaller wooden panels and then working on larger scale canvases of 91.5 x 76 cm and 111.5 x 91.5 cm in size. I built a drying rack in which I could horizontally store the paintings, which allowed me to work on 10 paintings of each size, a total of 20 canvas, in parallel.

During this period my focus turned to what I have identified as the provisional nature of artworks. An understanding of the provisional is bound up with different types of intentionality that I referred to above and the perceived sense of 'finish' the paintings held. My readings of Cezanne and the *non-finito* and De Keyser in terms of paring back the image made me think about the minimum

amount of content required for there to be a painting. This led me to begin to forestall myself in the processes of painting. This meant that before I took control of the image and steered it toward some previous model, I would stop working on it. This created a sense of pause and rupture within my own painting processes and also within the viewing experience of them.

Fig 39: *Untitled* 2012 oil on board
48 x 40 cm (Photograph: Carl Warner)

Fig 40: *Untitled* 2012 oil on board
48 x 40 cm (Photograph: Carl Warner)

This resulted in a more unfinished, slightly raw look. It was unfinished in the sense that these paintings had only been worked through two 'states' and much of the primer was left exposed. (Fig 39 and 40) At the time of painting them they seemed quite foreign, so what I enjoy about these paintings is that they remain for me mysterious and unexplained. What was important was that these works resisted precise understandings about their nature. That said, over time spent looking at them in the studio and hung at home a better understanding has come for me about these works. In reducing the painting to two contrasting types of form I felt I was setting up a stronger dialectical reading between the simplified components within these paintings. Figure 39 presents a fluid rhizomtic structure in the blue underpainting that is combined with more rationally structured dashes of white paint that float in the foreground plane. This sometimes aligns or parallels the rhythms of the underpainting, and the syntax

of this composition reminds me of the Deleuzian distinction between smooth and striated space.

During this period I also began a series of acrylic on paper studies (19 x 16 cm). The works on paper acted as a testing ground for ideas that were emerging in the larger works and vice versa. The change in scale also provides a different spatial relationship of the gestural movements of the arm and hand to the size of the canvas, panel, or page.

Fig 41: *Untitled* 2012 Acrylic on paper 16 x 19 cm

Fig 42: *Untitled* 2012 Acrylic on paper (collage) 19 x 16 cm

Mixing up my processes, I began to cut and collage these works on paper. (Fig. 42) This provided sharper pictorial and visual contrasts than I have been generating in my previous paintings. These processes, from minimal states of painting, working between different scales, medium, collaging, aimed to pause and rupture my painterly habits and generate new directions for my work.

I tried to sustain the spontaneity in the more minimal works to the works on paper via the application of successive layers of painting. In some of these works I used a transparent misty layer to 'reset' the surface of the painting. This functioned as a type of diagram to activate the whole image; to bring it into play, so to speak. These thin layers of paint also revealed the history of the work as they conveyed a pictorial and processual depth when reading the states the painting has gone through. (Fig 43 and 44)

Fig 43: *Untitled* 2012 oil on board
48 x 40 cm (Photograph: Carl Warner)

Fig 44: *Untitled* 2012 oil on board
48 x 40 cm (Photograph: Carl Warner)

Working on the larger canvases for my final exhibition integrated the different processes that had developed in the smaller works in order to develop a broad range of different types of abstraction. During this period I also continued the works on paper in order to help keep the practice circulating. Due to the fact that I could work on up to 20 canvases at once there was no compulsion to see each painting through to its completion. This allowed me to leave the paintings in a state where I could examine and get to know them over a longer period of time. This back and forth process between the large paintings and works on paper, and a more interwoven approach to developing a body of work reinforced the enjoyment and necessity of experimentation. It was within this multi-method approach that I found myself in the free and challenging space of painting that I had been seeking at the beginning of the research project.

Fig 45: *Untitled* 2012 oil on canvas 111.5 x 91.5 cm (Photograph: Carl Warner)

What was particularly satisfying was the feeling that I had developed a more challenging painting practice. By opening it up to explore strategies of abstraction in various forms I found I was also more actively engaged in processes of understanding and interpretation. Central to this was that I had begun to deal more comfortably with symbolic form and the relationships between them in painting. By breaking free from the uniform fields of my earlier abstracts I felt my paintings were more challenging for me as a maker and for the spectator. By isolating the diagram and setting up dialectical relationships within the images I feel I have found an arena within which I can explore the syntactical, signifying and symbolic registers of abstract painting.

In addition, by relaxing the criteria of what was a 'finished' picture I developed a better understanding of the irreducible relationship between reason, process and result (as discussed by Verwoert). By exploring the thresholds of the readable and the visible I feel I have generated a range of abstract works that

engage the spectator's 'will-to-meaning'. Yet the balancing of abstraction and referentiality within these painting ultimately leaves this impulse suspended. This I believe opens and extends the nature of the spectator's engagement with these paintings.

Final Exhibition

My final exhibition was held at the QUT Art Museum in early 2013. It occupied two rooms, the foyer and access ramp. The show consisted of 31 paintings, ranging from smaller scale works on panel, medium and larger scale canvas, including one large diptych. I enjoyed the installation process, which was done with Megan Williams, QUTAM Curator (Public Programs). An exhibition is a special occasion as it provides an opportunity to arrange and present a body of works. It is also a unique occasion in the sense that it presents a body of work that most likely will never be seen together again in a specific space. The installation of the paintings, how they interact, how relationships are set up between them, and how the installation responds to the space they are exhibited in, add rich levels of interpretation to the work and art practice.

One of the most valuable outcomes that I have gained from other artist's practice-led research are the developments that occur within an artist's practice as evidenced by the creative works. As the weighting of my research is heavily in favour of the creative work I felt it was paramount that my developments and shifts were displayed in my final exhibition. My main concern with the exhibition was to present a range of work that reflected the themes of this research project, its exploratory nature and to set up a reading across the works that made the most of comparisons and different contrasts between the works.

To do this I selected a small number of earlier works, dating back to 2010 and 2011, and then progressed to more recent work that had been completed in the months preceding the exhibition. As with the other exhibitions during this

research project I did not want to organise the exhibition chronologically. Instead my intention was to draw attention to the different types of abstraction that I was exploring. This strategy was intended to break my and viewers' habitual patterns of perception and expectation.

Fig 46: *Untitled* 2011 oil on canvas (diptych) 136.5 x 223 cm

I would like to discuss the groupings of a few paintings in this exhibition. When arranging the exhibition I thought about how one would most likely move through the space of the gallery and the order in which one would see the works. A large diptych (Fig 46) was hung in the foyer. This acted as an introduction, but was also a sort of false introduction because there were no other paintings of this scale in the exhibition. I wanted to exhibit the painting but I did not want it to dominate, or be read as more important than other works because it was my intention to invert the hierarchy that granted greater significance to large works.

Fig 47: *Untitled* 2011 oil on canvas 71 x 61 cm.

Moving into the exhibition space proper the first painting seen was a small abstract (Fig 47), which was painted just before the foyer painting. While these two paintings were developed from the same fundamental process the handling of the paint is different. By placing them in close proximity I wanted to highlight their differences. This painting is more rhizomatic in nature, and was inspired by the writings of Deleuze and Guattari (who introduced the concept of the rhizome in *A Thousand Plateaus)*. While I generally do not want to make paintings that are illustrative of theory (if such a thing is possible), this painting functioned (in this context) as a map of sorts for the rest of the exhibition. The development that occurred in my practice, after these early abstract tessellation paintings, was to make my practice rhizomatic (here I mean exploratory without a clear guiding principle or intention) rather than appearing to illustrate a rhizome.

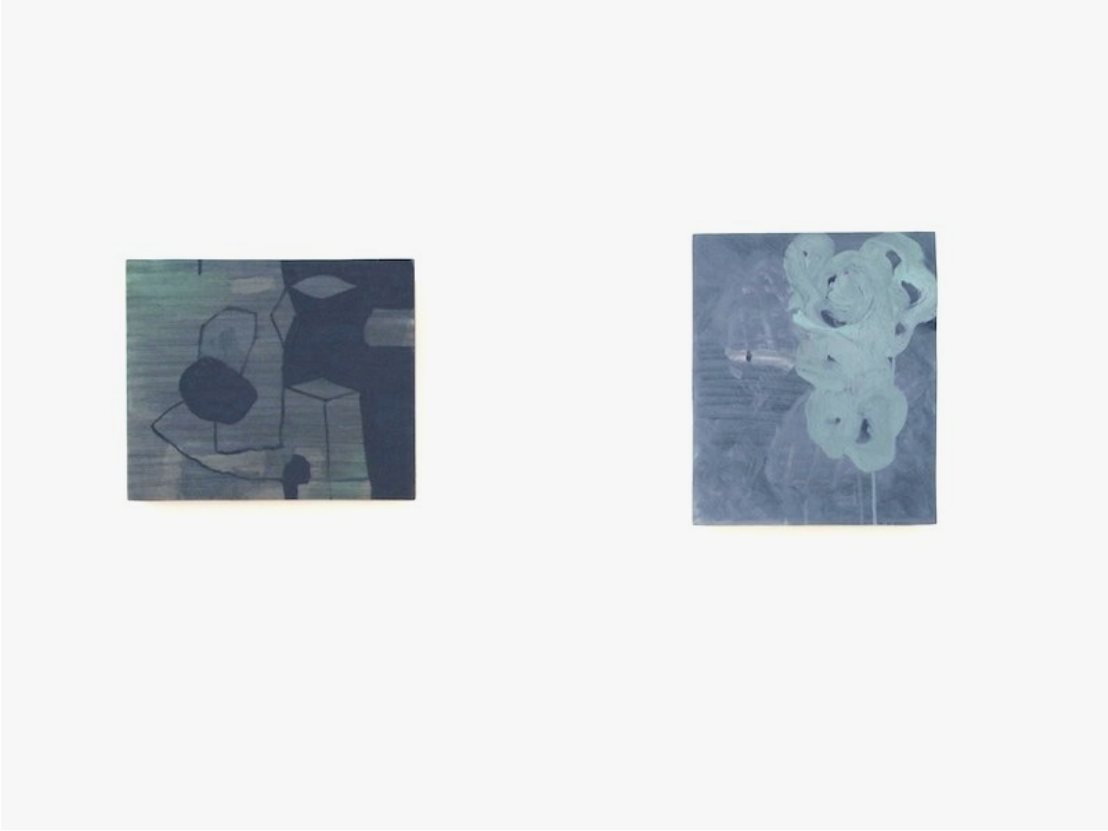

Fig 48: (left) *Untitled* 2012 oil on board 40 x 48 cm, (right) *Untitled* 2012 oil on board 48 x 40 cm

The two paintings reproduced above were hung together. This juxtaposition was developed to reveal two different types of paint and compositional handling that I refer to in the previous section. These include intentional marks (as discussed in relation to the work of Lasker), and the employment of intentional chance, as understood as the Deleuzian 'diagram'. Although it is not explicit both of these works present different understandings of the diagrammatic. The painting on the left sets up a more illustrative understanding as a diagram of interpretative process. Whereas the painting of the right employs a more spontaneous Deleuzian 'diagram' or 'graph' as a floating enigmatic form.

Fig 49: *Untitled* 2012 oil on canvas
111.5 x 91.5cm (Photograph: Carl Warner)

Fig 50: *Untitled* 2012 oil on canvas
91.5 x 76 cm (Photograph: Carl Warner)

On the adjacent wall the above paintings were paired to encourage the viewer to reflect upon their similarities and differences. These two paintings differ in the number of 'states' they passed through to reach their final form. This is evident in the emphasis on the materiality of the paintings, which changes their reading in the following manner: Fig. 49 is a more minimally worked painting, and stood unfinished for a long time before I added the yellow corner. This was done to add a sense of horizon and landscape to the image. In hindsight, there is something of the feeling of renewal that is associated with the sun in Guston's *Untitled* (Fig. 18). Figure 50 is a heavily worked painting. It passed through numerous states and contains several visible layers of underpainting. It reads somewhat like a landscape with hints of architecture. By placing Fig 50 next to Fig 49 I wanted to draw out the allusion to the landscape element of Fig 49. I also wanted to contrast the differing nature of their respective resolutions and embodied structures.

Fig 51: Final Exhibition 2013 QUT Art Museum Brisbane (photograph: Richard Stringer)

The paintings in the rest of the exhibition were generally mixed into smaller and larger groups and clusters that were organised so as to help the viewer more easily compare and contrast different types of handling and content. (Fig 51)

Fig 52: *Untitled* 2012 oil on canvas
91.5 x 111.5 cm (Photograph: Carl Warner)

Fig 53: *Untitled* 2012 oil on canvas
111.5 x 91.5 cm (Photograph: Carl Warner)

The final two paintings I would like to discuss from the exhibition were the most recent works in the research project. They were hung at opposite ends of the back wall of the second room in the gallery. These were prime viewing locations in the room as the paintings had long lines of sight. They were the first paintings placed during the installation process, and underpinned the entire hanging of the room. Figure 52 is an interesting painting for me. It developed from the works on paper in which I was bringing the ground primer back over the image and using collage. The image developed in a spontaneous manner. On reflection I see that the encroaching area of white and pink at its edge leaves a negative space that defines the central form. The shape of the central form looks a bit like a chromosome. The underpainting shows through this negative space and resembles a fence-like structure or a pit.

The second painting (Fig 53) works in a contrasting manner to Figure 52. The central form is the final layer of painting. This cloud-like mass is what defines the frame, which contains and probes the centre with the two antenna-like forms rising at the bottom of the image. The overall form of the image feels like a mirror. This painting, for me, epitomises the nature of the research project for the cloud defines the frame, and the frame in turn contains and explores the cloud.

Conclusion

In answering my research question — 'how can abstract painting resist clear and direct communication, yet still generate aesthetic and critical meaning?' — this research project has sought to examine the role that ambiguity and semiosis play in the *agency* (or the *performative* nature) of abstract painting. This has been done using two complementary areas of research, creative practice and the written exegesis.

Within the written exegesis I have examined a lineage of a particular type of abstraction. Using Damisch's *Theory of /Cloud/* and synthesising it with similar concerns in the writings of Deleuze's *Logic of Sensation* and Verwoert's writings on latency and emergence I have highlighted the temporal nature of the experience of /cloud/. This experience engenders a suspension or a pausing and rupturing of our usual interpretative frameworks and works to prolong the spectator's aesthetic engagement. Furthermore, I have sought to show that the aesthetic qualities of /cloud/, visual (and hence interpretative) slippage, and the dynamics of transition, *passage*, latency and emergence work to open the interpretative experience of the viewer and deepen the imaginative and poetic qualities of the aesthetic experience.

This study has also included an examination of what constitutes the readable (the rational registers) and the visible (the affective registers) for a contemporary abstract painting practice. Importantly, what is readable in a contemporary abstract painting practice goes beyond the distinction between what is representational or re-presentational and what is not. It extends to understandings of compositional structure and the syntactical use of form as signifying in their operation. It also includes the over-riding directionality and intentionality with which one positions their artwork and practice in relation to the discourse they are operating within. Staking out a position in the field, while at the same time, not over-determining my artworks has been at the forefront of my mind during this process. I extend this analysis by examining these qualities in relation the works and practice of a range of artists including contemporary

abstract painters, Brice Marden, Jonathan Lasker, Thomas Nozkowski and Raoul De Keyser.

In order to work with and build upon these artists' work I have employed experimental painting processes applying and editing 'controlled chance' in order to generate non-preconceived content in my paintings. A key finding for me in this regard has been the isolation of the Deleuzian 'diagram' in which 'controlled chance' is employed to generate abstract form, yet these form are set into symbolically and syntactically ambiguous and dialectical relationships within the overall composition of the painting. I have found that the balancing and juxtaposition of spontaneous and more-rational painting processes within the image helps to develop the qualities of /cloud/, slippage, transition and *passage* which I have been seeking.

In the broader picture of contemporary art practice my creative works present a more traditional formulation of abstract painting. I have not explored the expanded field of contemporary painting by, for example, using non-traditional supports and media, incorporating sculptural elements, sound, light or large-scale installation or site-specific works. Instead I have chosen to limit the 'container' in order to more closely examine the 'contents'. My painting practice has undergone a significant transformation as I have sought to develop an elemental abstract painterly vocabulary. The examination of the readable and the visible in terms of syntactical, semiotic and symbolic ambiguity has throughout this process been my prime focus. This is not to say that I will not at some time in the future expand the materials and mediums of my painting practice.

Above all this research project has examined ways in which abstraction can work with, yet also problematise, our habits of perception. The qualities in painting that I have sought to articulate and perform throughout this research project are those that aim to plurify and open the nature of the aesthetic experience. In targeting aesthetic experience that operates on the thresholds of the known and the unknown I have attempted to articulate and demonstrate

how we as makers and spectators of abstract painting can expand our imaginative horizons.

Let me now restate the significance of my research. Essentially the core of the project is the application of Damisch's /cloud/ to contemporary abstract painting, something he has not done, and has not been done by someone else. This has included an exploration of the temporal nature of the experience of /cloud/. I have done this by drawing attention to the /cloud/-like qualities of abstraction; visual (and hence interpretative) slippages, ambiguity, pause and rupture, and the dynamics of transition, *passage,* latency, emergence and polysemy. Of great use has been the work of Deleuze on Francis Bacon and Verwoert's work on latency. I have also used a range of visual exemplars and have worked through these notions within my own practice. The works themselves, and the manner of their installation in exhibition, exemplify many of these qualities.

In detailing the processes and shifts that have occurred within in my creative practice I have made available how the qualities of /cloud/ can work in an artistic practice, or as praxis. Here the qualities of pause and rupture, transition, slippages and emergence that can be associated with /cloud/ work to mix up and break established clichés, habits and intentions and open up the creative practice to explore a range of creative potentials. Applying the notion of /cloud/ to creative practice works to set creative practice in motion and transition, in advance of oneself. Likewise, the overall presentation of my final exhibition also drew upon qualities of /cloud/ on order to mix up, open and extend the reading of the work and of the practice. In doing all this I have teased out a specified understanding of /cloud/ and rendered it applicable to the discourse of contemporary abstract painting.

References

Alphen, Ernst van. 2005. *Art in mind : how contemporary images shape thought*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. http://www.loc.gov/catdir/toc/ecip0419/2004015820.html.

Bernstein, Charles. 2013. "Disfiguring Abstraction." *Critical Inquiry* Vol. 39 (No.3 (Spring 2013)): pp 486-497. jstor.org/stable/10.1086/670042.

Badiou, A. 2000. "Of Life as a Name of Being, or, Deleuze's Vitalist Ontology." *Crises of the Transcendental: From Kant to Romanticism. Pli: Vol 10, The Warwick Journal of Philosophy*, Department of Philosophy, University of Warwick

Bode, Christophe. 1988. "The Aesthetics of Ambiguity." Paper presented at the ACTAS Del XII Congreso Nacional De La Asociacion Espanola De Estudios Anglo-NorteAmericanos.

Bois, Y-A and Krauss, R 1997 Formless: A User's Guide. MIT Press

Bolt, Barbara. 2004. *The Exegesis and the Shock of the New.* In *Text,* Accessed 3/2/2014*, http://www.textjournal.com.au/speciss/issue3/bolt.htm*

Crowther, Paul. 1993. *Art and Embodiment: From Aesthetics to Self-consciousness*. Clarendon Press, Oxford.

Damisch, Hubert. 2002. *A theory of cloud/ : toward a history of painting*, *Cultural memory in the present.* Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press. http://www.loc.gov/catdir/toc/fy037/2002001376.html.

Damisch, Hubert. 2005. "Eight Theses for (Or against?) a Semiology of Painting." *Oxford Art Journal* 28 (2): 259-267. http://www.jstor.org/stable/4500021.

Damisch, Hubert. 2009. "Remarks on Abstraction": MIT Press.

Deleuze, Gilles. 1986. *Cinema 1 : the movement image*. London: Athlone.

Deleuze, Gilles. 1991. *Bergsonism*. New York: Zone Books.

Deleuze, Gilles. 1994. *Difference and Repetition*. Great Britian: Columbia University Press New York.

Deleuze, Gilles and Francis Bacon. 2003. *Francis Bacon : the logic of sensation*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Godfery, Tony. 2000. "Jonathan Lasker: the dialectics of touch." *Contemporary Visual Arts* 1 Jan 2000: pp. 22-27. New York: Sperone Westwater.

Green, Tyler. 2013. *The Modern Art Notes Podcast: Thomas Nozkowski*. Accessed 3/2/2014. http://blogs.artinfo.com/modernartnotes/2013/02/the-man-podcast-thomas-nozkowski/

Haskell, Barbara, Agnes Martin, Anna Chave, Rosalind E. Krauss and Whitney Museum of American Art. 1992. *Agnes Martin*. New York: Whitney Museum of American Art : Distributed by H.N. Abrams.

Hobbs, Robert. 2012. *Jonathan Lasker: Early Works*. New York: Cheim & Read,

Kertess, Klaus, Brice Marden and David Whitney. 1992. *Brice Marden, paintings and drawings*. New York: H.N. Abrams.

Kaufman, E (ed) & Heller, J.K. (ed) (1998). *Deleuze and Guattari: New Mappings in Politics, Philosophy and Culture*. Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press

Lasker, J. 2009 *Jonathan Lasker @ PAM*, accessed August 31, 2011.

http://www.portlandart.net/archives/2008/12/jonathan_lasker.html

O'Sullivan, Simon. 2001 *The Aesthetics of Affect: thinking art beyond representation.* ANGELAKI: journal of the theoretical humanities volume 6 number 3, December 2001.

O'Sullivan, Simon. 2006. "Art Encounters Deleuze and Guattari Thought Beyond Representation." New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Rajchman, John. 1995. Another View of Abstraction. *Journal of Philosophy and the Visual Arts: Abstraction* (5):16-24. London: Academy.

Robinson, K. 2010. Back to Life: Deleuze, Whitehead and Process. *Deleuze Studies*, Mar 2010, Vol. 4, No. 1: pp. 120-133.

Roffe, J. 2002. "Gilles Deleuze." Accessed 3/2/2014, http://www.iep.utm.edu/deleuze/.

Rowley, George. 1947. *Principles of Chinese painting*. 2nd ed, *Princeton monographs in art and archaeology ; 24.* Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

Rubenstein, R. 2009. "Provisional Painting." *Art in America* May. http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/features/provisional-painting-raphael-rubinstein/2/.

Schwabsky, B. 2004. "Raoul De Keyser: Whitechapel Art Gallery, London." *Artforum International* Vol. 42 (No.10): pp. 240-41.

Schwabsky, B. 2010. "An Art of Transition." Accessed 22/7/2013. http://www.transitiongallery.co.uk/htmlpages/Fade_Away/text.html.

Scott, A. 2011. "Gilles Deleuze Difference and Repetition." Accessed 22/2/2013. http://www.angelfire.com/md2/timewarp/deleuze.html.

Scrivener, S. 2002. The art object does not embody a form of knowledge. *Working Papers in Art and Design*. Accessed 2 Oct 2013 http://www.herts.ac.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0008/12311/WPIAAD_vol2_scrivener.pdf

Shklovsky, Viktor. (1917) “Art as Technique.” Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays. Ed. Ed. Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reiss. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1965. 3-24.

Sylvester, David. 1997. *About modern art : critical essays, 1948-97*. New updated ie. Rev ed. London: Pimlico.

Verwoert, Jan. 2005. "Emergence: On the Painting of Tomma Abts." In *Tomma Abts*, 41-48.

Verwoert, Jan. 2008a. "Choosing to Choose." *Parkett* No.84 ((December 2008)): 49-55.

Verwoert, Jan. 2008b. "Tomma Abts. London, United Kingdom: Phaidon Inc Ltd.

Yau, John. 2010. "*Thomas Nozkowski with John Yau: Inconversation*." Accessed 23/7/2013. http://www.brooklynrail.org/2010/11/art/thomas-nozkowski-with-john-yau.

Yau, John. 2013. "*Thomas Nozkowski and Philip Guston Talk to Each Other Without Knowing It.*" Accessed 23/7/2013. http://hyperallergic.com/73473/thomas-nozkowski-and-philip-guston-talk-to-each-other-without-knowing-it/.

Bibliography

Alphen, Ernst van. 2005. *Art in mind : how contemporary images shape thought*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. http://www.loc.gov/catdir/toc/ecip0419/2004015820.html.

Bernstein, Charles. 2013. "Disfiguring Abstraction." *Critical Inquiry* Vol. 39 (No.3 (Spring 2013)): pp 486-497. jstor.org/stable/10.1086/670042.

Bode, Christophe. 1988. "The Aesthetics of Ambiguity." Paper presented at the ACTAS Del XII Congreso Nacional De La Asociacion Espanola De Estudios Anglo-NorteAmericanos.

Crowther, Paul. 1993. *Art and Embodiment: From Aesthetics to Self-consciousness*.

Damisch, Hubert. 2002. *A theory of cloud/ : toward a history of painting*, *Cultural memory in the present.* Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press. http://www.loc.gov/catdir/toc/fy037/2002001376.html.

Damisch, Hubert. 2005. "Eight Theses for (Or against?) a Semiology of Painting." *Oxford Art Journal* 28 (2): 259-267. http://www.jstor.org/stable/4500021.

Damisch, Hubert. 2009. "Remarks on Abstraction": MIT Press.

Deleuze, Gilles. 1986. *Cinema 1 : the movement image*. London: Athlone.

Deleuze, Gilles. 1994. *Difference and Repetition*. Great Britian: Columbia University Press New York.

Deleuze, Gilles and Francis Bacon. 2003. *Francis Bacon : the logic of sensation*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Godfery, Tony. 2000. "Jonathan Lasker: the dialectics of touch." *Contemporary Visual Arts* 1 Jan 2000: pp. 22-27.

Green, Tyler. 2013. *The Modern Art Notes Podcast: Thomas Nozkowski*. http://blogs.artinfo.com/modernartnotes/2013/02/the-man-podcast-thomas-nozkowski/

Haskell, Barbara, Agnes Martin, Anna Chave, Rosalind E. Krauss and Whitney Museum of American Art. 1992. *Agnes Martin*. New York: Whitney Museum of American Art : Distributed by H.N. Abrams.

Hobbs, Robert. 2012. "Jonathan Lasker: Early Works: Cheim & Read New York.

Kertess, Klaus, Brice Marden and David Whitney. 1992. *Brice Marden, paintings and drawings*. New York: H.N. Abrams.

O'Sullivan, Simon. 2006. "Art Encounters Deleuze and Guattari Thought Beyond Representation." 256 p.

Roffe, J. 2002. "Gilles Deleuze." http://www.iep.utm.edu/deleuze/.

Rowley, George. 1947. *Principles of Chinese painting*. 2nd ed, *Princeton monographs in art and archaeology ; 24.* Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

Rubenstein, R. 2009. "Provisional Painting." *Art in America* May. http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/features/provisional-painting-raphael-rubinstein/2/.

Schwabsky, B. 2004. "Raoul De Keyser: Whitechapel Art Gallery, London." *Artforum International* Vol. 42 (No.10): pp. 240-41.

Schwabsky, B. 2010. "An Art of Transition." Accessed 22/7/2013. http://www.transitiongallery.co.uk/htmlpages/Fade_Away/text.html.

Scott, A. 2011. "Gilles Deleuze Difference and Repetition." Accessed 22/2/2013. http://www.angelfire.com/md2/timewarp/deleuze.html.

Sylvester, David. 1997. *About modern art : critical essays, 1948-97*. New updated ie. Rev ed. London: Pimlico.

Verwoert, Jan. 2005. "Emergence: On the Painting of Tomma Abts." In *Tomma Abts*, 41-48.

Verwoert, Jan. 2008a. "Choosing to Choose." *Parkett* No.84 ((December 2008)): 49-55.

Verwoert, Jan. 2008b. "Tomma Abts. London, United Kingdom: Phaidon Inc Ltd.

Yau, John. 2010. "Thomas Nozkowski with John Yau: Inconversation." Accessed 23/7/2013. http://www.brooklynrail.org/2010/11/art/thomas-nozkowski-with-john-yau.

Yau, John. 2013. "**Thomas Nozkowski and Philip Guston Talk to Each Other Without Knowing It**." Accessed 23/7/2013. http://hyperallergic.com/73473/thomas-nozkowski-and-philip-guston-talk-to-each-other-without-knowing-it/.